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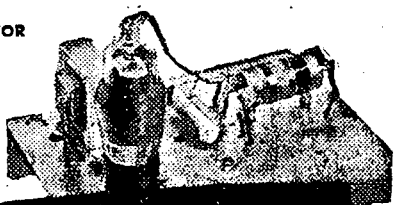

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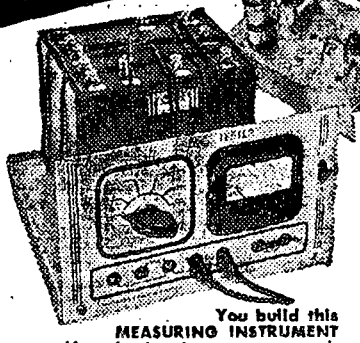

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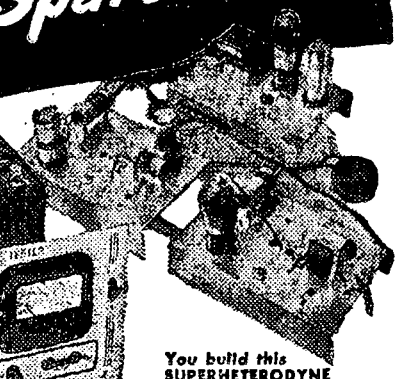

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Front cover painting by Robert Gipson Jones illustrating a scene from "Princess Of The Sea."

JANUARY 1947

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VOLUME 9
NUMBER 1

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

DON WILCOX, one of your all time favorites in Fantastic Adventures, is back this month with a book-length novel that really ought to give you a lot of pleasant reading. "Princess Of The Sea" is a novel of strange people in a strange land—where anything could happen, and frequently did. Don talked to us about this story while he was writing it, and said in all modesty that he felt it was one of his best pieces of work. After we read the completed manuscript we had to agree with him. And we feel confident that you'll say the same thing after reading it yourself. And of course we can't forget to mention the swell Robert Gibson Jones cover that was painted for the novel. Jones is one of the best cover artists in the business, and this is one of his finest pieces of work. You'll see more of Jones!

THIS month we're introducing another new writer to the pages of your favorite magazine. We were wading through the unrush mail one day when we ran across a manuscript by Charles F. Myers. We started to read it—and before we got half way through the story we were laughing so much that the whole staff gathered around to see what was the matter. The matter was "I'll Dream Of You," which you'll find on page 46, and we think we've "found" another writer for your preferred reading list. Mr. Myers writes in a style that is reminiscent of the late and very much lamented Thorne Smith—which ought to be enough said right there. But he has created a character in "Toffee" the dream-girl, that we feel will become one of your favorite fictional characters. At any rate, we're way ahead of your demands for a sequel in saying that you'll find another Toffee and Marc Pillsworth story in our next issue. But don't let that detract from the pleasure you'll get out of this first story. And let us know what you think of this yarn after you finish reading it. If you really like "Toffee," we'll see that Mr. Myers is kept pretty busy. . . .

H. B. HICKEY brought in a short-short story a few weeks back, and laid it on our desk, saying: "I had an idea for a little yarn about future men. From the looks of things today, man is going to destroy himself, so I tried to show what might happen a few centuries or so from now." We listened, and then read. You'll find some pleasant reading too, in "A Little Knowledge." And as an after thought, maybe Hickey is right in his belief. From a quick glance at the world around us we wouldn't be too surprised if the "cave man" were far from being extinct!

THIS issue catches us right at the time of a threatened printing strike. So we're keeping our fingers crossed, hoping this issue will reach you on time. As a consequence, the reader's page had to be omitted from this issue. But don't let this keep you from sending in your letters. We'll have the reader's page back as soon as possible!

GEOFFREY ST. REYNARD wrote a story about a pirate and a professor, which you'll find in this issue under the title, "Androcles And The Buccaneer." You might call this yarn a fable—in as much as they both *lived happily ever after*. That's all we'll say about it now. You'll find out just what we mean when you read the story.

FINISHING up the issue is a short story by Alexander Blade, entitled, "Death Wears A Rose." This is a mood story that ought to hold you until you get to the last line. The idea behind the story is not exactly new—since many people have experienced a feeling that "death was close." You can call it a sixth sense, or pure instinct, or if you prefer the mystic you might say that spirits have a direct influence on us. At any rate, Mr. Blade wrote a gripping fantasy around this controversial subject, and whatever explanation is attached to experiences like this, it's darn good reading. . . .

WE'D like to acknowledge the numerous letters you readers sent in praising the short novel, "Minions Of The Tiger," by Chester S. Geier in our September issue last year. We were mighty glad to get those letters because you backed up our belief that Chet is one of the finest writers in the fantasy field today. Anyway, we're offering you another treat next month by presenting another short novel by Geier, "Forever Is Too Long." This time Chet writes about a man who achieved immortality. We don't say the idea is new, but we do say that the way Geier handled the story is unusual.

BOB WILLIAMS will also be on hand, plus many more of your favorites. Which winds us up for this issue. See you next month. *Rap.*

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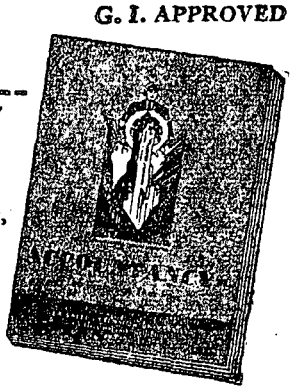

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Princess of the Sea

IF YOU were one of the few persons invited to enter the study of J. J. Wellington, that fabulous financier of New York City, you would notice at once that everything in the room was highly polished—including Mr. Wellington himself. It would be a question which of the two very round objects would catch your eye first—the four-foot globe or Mr. Wellington. Many points of similarity might be observed between these two. Mr. Wellington was not quite as large as the globe. He was not quite immobile. And to be sure, he was not quite as round. If he sat huddled over his desk glaring at a sheaf of papers you would be more likely to turn your attention to the globe.

You would not find the continents of North and South America on this highly colored four-foot sphere. At the slightest touch it would rotate but you would look in vain for any familiar landmark—unless you were already acquainted with the continent of Venus. On this particular August afternoon J. J. Wellington, restless with suppressed energy, paced around the tripod which held the globe. Whenever he gave the sphere a spin, in his manner of work-

The city lay deeply hidden beneath the water, safe from all things it seemed—until one day . . . .

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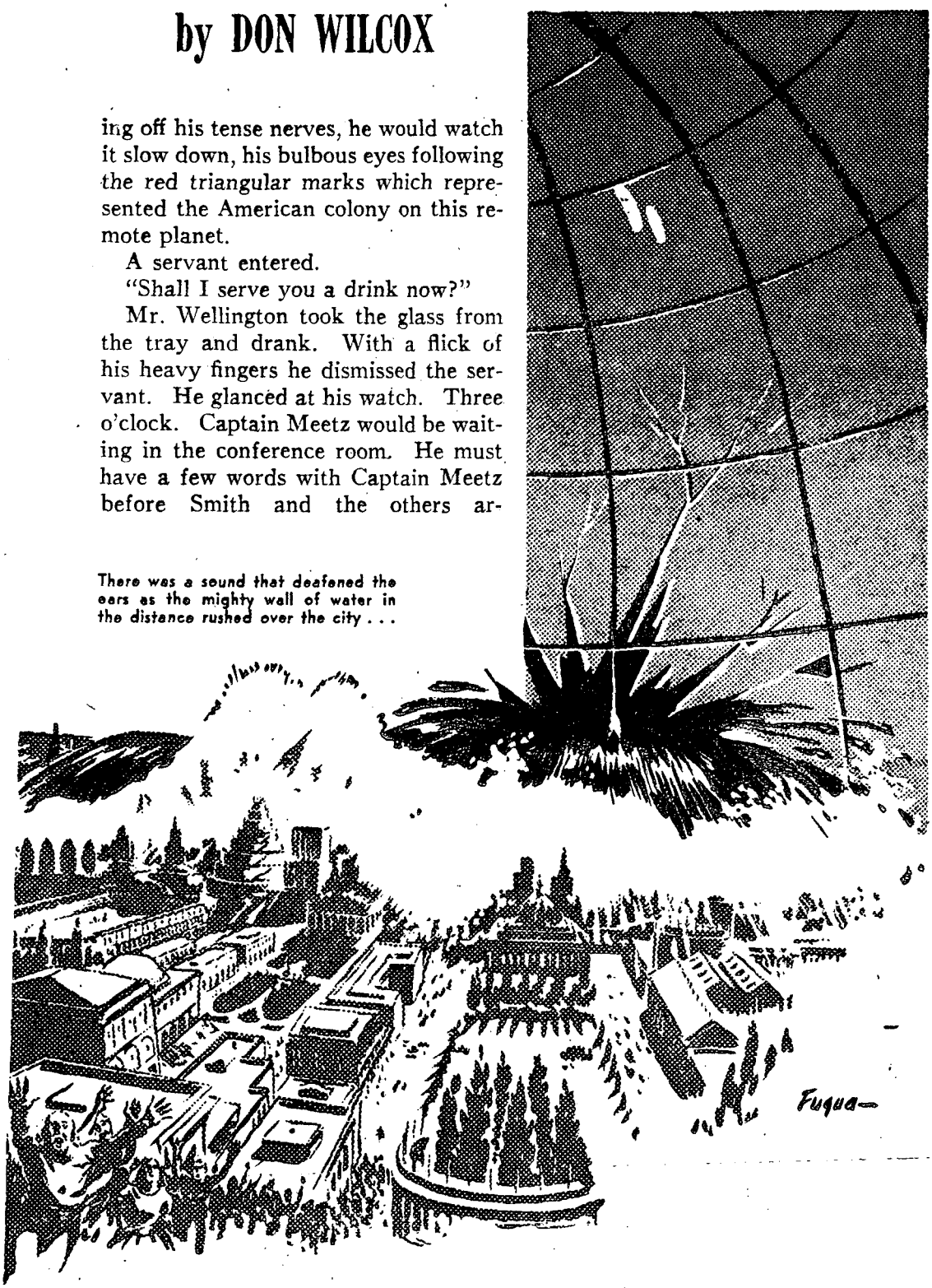
by DON WILCOX

ing off his tense nerves, he would watch it slow down, his bulbous eyes following the red triangular marks which represented the American colony on this remote planet.

A servant entered.

"Shall I serve you a drink now?"

Mr. Wellington took the glass from the tray and drank. With a flick of his heavy fingers he dismissed the servant. He glanced at his watch. Three o'clock. Captain Meetz would be waiting in the conference room. He must have a few words with Captain Meetz before Smith and the others ar-



There was a sound that deafened the ears as the mighty wall of water in the distance rushed over the city . . .

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rived. It was important that Smith should not know. . . .

AS STUPE SMITH and his diminutive friend walked down the street that afternoon on their way to the offices of J. J. Wellington, they were not aware that people turned to comment.

"Isn't that Stupe Smith?"

"Well, by George, so it is. Looks just the same as in the newsreel."

"I wonder what he has been doing since that rescue in the Andes. The papers have not said much about it recently. He's a great guy, all right, but he sure had a bad break on that South American deal."

Stupe Smith did not notice the passers-by because he had gotten used to being the subject of comment wherever he went. As his little friend Hefty Winkle would say, it was like water off a duck's back.

"You don't reckon you could wangle a way for me to get in?" Hefty asked for the twelfth time.

"Sorry, Hefty. The invitation was just for me. You know. But I'll tell you all about it as soon as the conference is over. It must be a big deal of some sort. You know Wellington."

"Everybody knows Wellington," Hefty commented with a slight tone of disdain. Money had never come easy for little Hefty Winkle, and perhaps it was his natural jealousy toward the financiers who rolled in millions. His own dough had come the hard way. He had been a professional wrestler and boxer at the county fairs. A hundred and forty pounds of nerve and muscle, he had taken on all comers. And as he had proved to Stupe Smith on several occasions he packed a hidden wallop that was almost inhuman.

"Don't let 'em give you any wooden nickels, Stupe," said Hefty, giving his partner a farewell wave.

"See you in an hour."

Stupe Smith sauntered up the marble steps into the lobby of the Wellington offices. Hefty watched him with his usual hero worship. He admired Stupe for more reasons than he often bothered to define. Stupe had played fair with him—had given him the breaks when he needed them. More than that, there was Stupe's attitude toward life—forever looking forward, trusting in the future, believing the best of his fellow men.

"He'll wow 'em," Hefty said to himself. "Whatever this adventure is that they're hashing up, they know he is the most reliable guide they could find anywhere. He proved that down in the Andes—even though the honors went to someone else. But that was only a bad break . . ."

SEVEN guests were assembled around the conference table. J. J. Wellington stood before them. In spite of his bulk, he was a handsome and commanding figure. His large, severe eyes, straight nose, his trim black mustache, the forward thrust of his hard jaw, gave solidity to his every word.

"Captain Meetz, and gentlemen—" Wellington's eyes moved slowly from one to the other of his guests—"I shall state my proposition. Each one of you is an expert in his own field. That is why I have brought you here. I am planning a most unique expedition to the planet of Venus. I am basing my plans upon the report of an explorer, about whom all of you have read accounts in the newspapers." Wellington glanced toward the door. "Mr. Vest will arrive in a few minutes."

A servant rolled the tripod that supported the globe across the floor to the open end of the table.

"Gentlemen," Wellington resumed, "You may be familiar with the map of

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the American colony on planet Venus. Captain Meetz, will you tell us something about the region surrounding this colony?"

Captain Meetz, a man of some reputation for his inter-planetary travels, rose and walked to the end of the table. He was a stocky man, dressed in a gray uniform trimmed in blue that matched his deep-set blue eyes. His face bore some resemblance to that of a bulldog —heavy jowls, sagging cheeks. He was a man of forty, a trifle old for his age, with a sprinkling of gray in his brown hair and thick brown mustache. He turned the globe to the best-known continent where the red ten-inch triangle was visible.

"I am honored, Mr. Wellington, to say a few words about this region—particularly if I am to have the opportunity of heading an expedition to this planet. Any wayfarers to this land are sure to pay their respects to the American colony, represented here by these red boundary lines. As you know, most of the civilization—civilization in *our* sense of the word—is to be found within these limits. The more or less human natives who dwell in this vicinity have made their peace with our own representatives. We maintain an American embassy here and our own government insists—"

At this point Meetz and Wellington exchanged glances which added weight to the Captain's words.

"—insists that no part of this continent be exploited in any way. That is to say, all private enterprises, for whatever purpose, must be approved by governmental order."

Stupe Smith sitting near the end of the table, nodded with satisfaction. Whatever venture might be in store, he thought, it was well to know that these promoters expected to square everything with the powers that be.

Captain Meetz might have gone on with a more elaborate description, but at that moment the door opened and there entered a small mysterious looking gentleman, obviously Mr. Vest.

Mysterious looking—this was Stupe Smith's mental comment, although he couldn't at first determine the source of his impression.

"Shall I come in?" the little stranger asked. He was smiling. There was a dreamy look in his eyes. He seemed at once to be fascinated by the ceiling rather than the group around the table. He gestured widely with his short arms, then drew himself up and adjusted his dressy bow tie and repeated the question to the ceiling. "Shall I come in now?"

There was something strange, Stupe thought, in his adding the word *now*. As if he had been waiting for some time for a signal, Wellington briskly ushered him to the table. Seated, he seemed more diminutive than ever, sitting next to his massive host.

"Gentlemen, I take extreme honor in presenting to you the explorer whose amazing accounts have made headlines during the past two weeks. This, gentlemen, is Mr. Vest. Mr. Vest is going to tell you something he has never revealed before to anyone, except myself—something he saw in the unknown regions of Venus. Go ahead Mr. Vest."

Mr. Vest spoke slowly and his tones were like the deep notes of a cello.

"What I have seen, my friends, is so very unbelievable—" Mr. Vest was looking through the ceiling now. "So unbelievable that when I tell you about *her*—when I describe *her* in all her beauty—*ah!*"

CHAPTER II

THE space ship took off on schedule —at six A.M. Eastern standard

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time. Captain Meetz brought the crew together as soon as the painful ordeal of acceleration had been achieved, and he gave a few general instructions regarding their duties on the ship during the flight. Then everyone was left to his own devices.

Hefty Winkle could hardly wait to catch Stupe for a private conversation. In the rear of the cabin they watched the diminishing globe within the velvety blackness of the sky. The earth's continents were no longer visible. The haze of atmosphere obscured oceans and mountains alike.

"I feel like I have jumped off into a bottomless pit," said Hefty. "You never even told me what this is all about and here I am shooting off into space."

"On your way to Venus."

"Yes, you told me that. But what? What's the pitch? What's all the secret about?"

The expedition had been brought together in such a hurry that Stupe himself was still a bit dizzy, but there loomed in his mind a chance for an adventure beyond anything he would ever experience on the earth. This was his first hop into space. However, it was not so much the novelty of climbing away from the earth as the importance of the goal which attracted him.

"You should have eavesdropped on our conference with Wellington," Stupe said. "I never saw a bunch of important people sold on a new idea so quickly. It was this strange little Mr. Vest who did it."

"Isn't he the guy that claims to have floated back from Mercury or somewhere recently?" Hefty asked.

"If you can believe all the stories the newspapers are printing he has seen more of this solar system than anyone else I know. But he revealed one particular experience to Wellington and that's where we come in."

Stupe settled down on the overstuffed chair and propped his long legs over a table. Hefty settled himself on a hassock and waited for Stupe's story.

"The whole idea is," Stupe said, "that one of Wellington's sidelines is a string of entertainment houses—ritzy joints for the millionaire class. He has a notion that there's something on Venus that he needs. A very unusual attraction—"

"To be specific—"

"To be specific, a beautiful girl."

Hefty's shoulders suddenly dropped in disgust. "I might have known it. Don't tell me that Wellington is sending this party all the way to Venus to pick up someone for the spotlights."

"Wellington is paying me one million dollars, cold cash to find and sign up this one particular dame," said Stupe, and he smiled as if the money were already in the bag. "He is also bearing the cost of this expedition to accompany me—"

"To accompany you? Then why aren't you the captain?"

"Don't be hasty, my friend. I have a certain reputation and this is my chance to multiply it about a hundred times over. The expedition is in the hands of Captain Meetz because there are a lot of technical details that Wellington thinks I should not be bothered with."

Hefty shifted restlessly. "All right, all right. What about the girl? Blond or brunette?"

"She lives under the sea," said Stupe, and his listener suddenly came to attention. "Yes, you heard me right. She rides on a beautiful white horse. This Mr. Vest has seen her riding up out of the sea, racing along the beach, and chasing back down into the waves."

Hefty batted his eyes. "Into the waves? How could she?"

Stupe laughed. "That's exactly

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what everyone asked around the conference table. But Mr. Vest remembered every detail of what he had seen and—well, to make a long story short, that's why Wellington is willing to pay me a million dollars. Can you imagine what this will mean to his entertainment world. He'll put on an underwater show that will leave them gasping."

For almost a minute Hefty said nothing. He looked back at the cottony ball that had been the earth and Stupe knew he was wondering whether this would be a wild goose chase.

"Well, Stupe, I've strung along with you through some curious deals before. I'll string along now. But this girl—this under water creature that Mr. Vest thought was a girl—Well, I'll believe it when I see it."

FROM a skyscraper observatory somewhere in New York, J. J. Wellington watched the space ship disappear into the white morning sky. He mused with satisfaction. It had all worked out very smoothly. His program for gaining a foothold on the newest and richest of earth man's frontiers was under way at last.

"They'll never find what I sent them to find," he said to himself, "but the hoax went over perfectly. And it's ten to one that when they don't find that ocean-dwelling beauty, they'll manage to pick up some curiosity or other."

For J. J. Wellington's purposes, the return of Mr. Vest from his solar peregrinations had been a godsend. For several years Wellington had had his eyes on the commercially promising regions around the American colony on Venus. But not until Mr. Vest had appeared, with his preposterous stories about the wonders of far-off-worlds, had Wellington contrived a workable scheme for getting around the law.

Captain Meetz, fortunately, had been willing to shoulder the responsibility for a fair percentage.

"You and I understand each other perfectly," Meetz had said. "For a man with Stupendous Smith's reputation to get permission to explore those regions will be a pushover. He's as honest as they come. And just unsuspecting enough for our purposes."

"Exactly," Wellington had agreed.

"And so we'll let Smith square things with the American embassy right from the start. He won't know there's any purpose but to pick up this sea-dwelling girl who rides the white horse—"

"A figment of Mr. Vest's insane imagination."

"Obviously," Captain Meetz had agreed with a restrained smile. "And while he carries on heroically looking for a girl who isn't there, I will see to it that the rest of the party surveys the land and its resources."

"Exactly."

"And we'll plant a few secret bases along the way for future expeditions. And by the way, what about future expeditions?"

"I'm 'way ahead of you," Wellington had said. "After a reasonable length of time, when your man Smith fails to find what he's looking for, I'll send another party to your rescue. They'll bring more supplies."

For a moment Captain Meetz had squinted dubiously. "What about the leader of the second group? Will he know our game?"

Wellington had not revealed any discomfort over that question. "You and I are cooperating, Captain Meetz. We have agreed upon your share in the long-term receipts of this venture. When I send a second party, you may be sure that they will act under your instructions after they arrive."

Yes, Wellington thought, as he

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watched the fading trail of dark smoke in the wake of the spaceship, Captain Meetz was a man to be depended upon. He would gain a secret foothold on those Venus lands, and he would never let Stupe Smith know the real purpose of the expedition.

CHAPTER III

"YOU find more things to worry about, Hefty, than anyone on board. What's the trouble now?"

Hefty was again ushering Stupe back to a quiet corner in the rear of the observation cabin for a private conversation. They opened two bottles of pop, drank leisurely, and gazed out at the dark sky.

"Stupe, you say they're giving that million dollars to you if you find that fanciful fantastic girl that rides through the sea?"

"That's right, Hefty."

"Why aren't they giving it to Captain Meetz? Is he just going along for the ride?"

"Now, Hefty, I didn't arrange this setup. When they toss a million dollars at you you don't ask too many questions. Do you?"

Hefty scowled. "Did you get to choose these crew members? Did you decide, for instance, that the three Stevens sisters would come along as airplane pilots for knocking around Venus?"

"The Stevens sisters won three prizes on their around the earth flights. I don't think anyone would question their ability as pilots."

"I'm not questioning that. I just asked, did you choose—"

"No."

"Did you select that guy Frenchy that looks like a refugee from a pirate ship?"

"No."

"Did you choose Gypsy Brown to come along and cook our grub?"

"What are you getting at, Hefty? Have you got any reason to be suspicious of any of these people? Don't you see that if I had had to go to the trouble of selecting every member of the crew we might have been delayed for a week? Now what's this all about?"

Hefty sipped at his straw and watched the orange pop fade away.

"Maybe I am suspicious or something. I never fancied riding around with a lady driver, even on the safest streets. The idea of tearing over the mountains of Venus with women pilots doesn't appeal to me."

Stupe laughed. "So that's it. Well don't let it worry you. You can walk."

They landed at sundown. The field at the Venusian capital was already lighted with a blaze of white lights. The landing signals, flashing in mile-long streaks of red, were co-ordinated perfectly with the spoken instructions that came in by radio.

"They speak English with a Venus accent up here," Captain Meetz remarked, working at the controls.

At last the ship came to a dead stop, and the party moved through the air locks. Arriving on a new planet was always an exciting time. Stupe was eager to try out his new Venus legs, as the saying went.

"Don't let the change in gravity throw you, Hefty," Captain Meetz warned, half in jest. "And you Fiddle boys, careful how you handle that luggage. It may bounce right out of your hands."

Actually, they had been adjusting themselves to this change for many hours in the past, wearing the specially constructed electric shoes and respiration belts that helped to bridge the shift from earth to Venus conditions.

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STUPE SMITH took fifteen long strides upon the table-smooth landing floor, breathing deep, glorying in the ease with which his muscles worked. He felt the need of exercise. The air was sweet and exhilarating.

"You don't have to run out on the party so soon," one of the Stevens girls called after him. "Good-bye, then. There goes our explorer."

"They call him Stupendous," one of her sisters said. "Give me a guy like Jake Fiddle. At least he's polite enough to carry a girl's suitcase."

Instantly Hefty Winkle bristled to Stupe's defense. "Cut it out. You know those Fiddle brothers are paid to heave the suitcases."

"What are you paid for?" one of the girls retorted.

"I'm Stupe's bodyguard, Sis. Wanna fight?"

The girl, a full head taller than Hefty, said that when she wanted to fight she'd pick on someone her own size.

The ribaldry ended a moment later when a red and silver car drove up, its headlights glowing on the side of the spaceship. Stupe remembered having seen pictures of the American ambassador to Venus. A tall, stately man with a solid handshake, he at once gave Stupe the impression of being democratic and reserved.

"The news of your coming reached us about twenty-four hours ago—we still speak in terms of earth time, you see—before you began to radio in. The Venus Clipper made an hour's stop on its regular run yesterday and it carried a letter from Mr. Wellington. So you see, I already know all about you."

Captain Meetz nodded. "Excellent. That will save us the trouble of explaining."

"Not altogether. Mr. Wellington stated that Mr. Smith would elaborate upon the exact nature of the mission. First, however, I must show you to your hotel accommodations."

Later that evening Captain Meetz bowed out of the picture for an early good night, leaving Stupe and the ambassador alone in front of the fireplace at the embassy.

"The nights in Venus are quite cool," the ambassador observed. "And besides, I've always fancied burning logs as a setting for diplomatic exchanges. I'm burning, too, by the way, with curiosity about the particular secret to which Mr. Wellington referred."

Stupe smiled. "Did you know Mr. Wellington personally?"

"Only a movie acquaintance," said the ambassador. "Every week the Venus Clipper brings us a newsreel from the Earth. You don't realize how much that means, when you're isolated from the bright lights."

"Bright lights? Those lights on the landing field were a good match for anything on the earth. Doesn't this capital have anything to match Broadway?"

"It tries hard enough. The American Colony here has transplanted a few theaters, and we try, after a fashion, to operate our own Hollywood. But our local film products haven't caught on. We have the material here, don't doubt it. Do you like a good western?"

STUPE smiled to himself. In his private scale of values there was nothing that could take the place of a good western movie.

"We have something here that makes your cattle rustlers of the old lawless days look pale. The winged men. Ever hear of them?"

"Winged men?"

"You'll see them within a few days. Once we used them in a few scenes of a local movie, and sent the finished product back to the Earth. But Holly-

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wood didn't believe it was genuine."

The ambassador laughed softly to himself. Stupe was somewhat puzzled over this allusion. He had never heard of winged men. In all of Mr. Vest's fanciful descriptions, no such monstrous creature had been mentioned.

"Never mind," the ambassador continued. "I can see that you're as unbelieving as the others. Hollywood thought our film was faked. We talked it over, here at the embassy, and decided that we wouldn't bother the earth with any more wingman reports. What the Earth people don't know won't hurt them. And why, after all, should we give this new planet a black eye? Don't you agree with me, Mr. Smith?"

Stupe nodded, not quite certain of himself. Wingmen?

The word had a fantastic sound. It's meaning couldn't quite be fathomed. But it gave Stupe the opportunity to say more about Wellington's foibles.

"If you have seen Mr. Wellington in the movies, you must know that he is a man who gets everything he wants. His money reaches out in many strange directions. Where some millionaires might go on a big game hunt for sport Wellington would be more likely to buy the whole Congo valley. Just now his imagination has been stirred by the tales of one Mr. Vest. Do you recall Mr. Vest?"

The ambassador knitted his brows but apparently found no Mr. Vest in his memory.

"He must have visited this land a few years ago," Stupe continued. "What he saw impressed him so much that he has sold Wellington a bill of goods. We have come on this expedition to find one particular specimen of humanity—a girl who lives under the sea."

Stupe waited for the ambassador's response. The tall man looked at him through stony eyes that gradually began to twinkle.

"You're quite serious?"

"That is my mission. Wellington wants what he wants. He is running a chain of entertainment houses for his millionaire friends and he thinks that this particular attraction, if it can be captured, kidnapped, or otherwise obtained—" Stupe was smiling broadly—"would create a sensation."

The ambassador laughed gently. "I understand. I had guessed Mr. Wellington to be that sort. Well, I can only wish you luck. I don't know what you will find, but in a land of winged men and two-ton snails, you may run across any number of other strange creatures."

Stupe drew a relaxed breath. It was good to know that the ambassador would not throw any legal stumbling blocks in his path.

"I presume you intend to do a little sightseeing before your search party goes to work?"

I was solemnly warned that this is not a pleasure jaunt at Mr. Wellington's expense," said Stupe. "If you will give us the lay of the land we will set out in our airplanes tomorrow.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Stupe Smith awakened it was not yet daylight. Through his window he could see a bright planet in the dark sky. He gazed at it with a curious interest.

"Old mother Earth," he said to himself. For several minutes he lay there, thinking to himself, how strange to be looking back upon the world I have always lived in. Only a dot in the sky. It was hard to believe that it could be, in reality, the home of two billion people, living together, building their civilizaton and reaching out—yes,

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reaching out toward other distant worlds.

"I'll be back soon, old mother Earth," he whispered. "But first I am going to see the wonders of this new land. So this is Venus!"

At the other window he looked out upon the landing field. In the gray of morning the spaceship was visible. Near it was a new object, much smaller. An airplane. One of the two planes constructed for Venus atmosphere. The mechanics had come through. They had worked through the night to assemble this plane so that this morning it was ready for flight.

By the time Stupe had dressed and walked on to the landing field the plane was already warmed up for flight. Velma Stevens had agreed to pilot today's preliminary excursion. She and one of the Fiddle brothers were breakfasting together in the Venusian hotel. On the grounds Stupe met Captain Meetz as he came from breakfast.

"You're starting out early this morning, Stupe," Meetz said.

"Want to go along?"

"Wouldn't mind. But there are several details I should attend to." Captain Meetz regarded Stupe with a questioning eye. "You had a good conference with the ambassador last night, I trust."

Stupe nodded. He related briefly the substance of their visit. Captain Meetz turned slowly and began to saunter back toward the hotel, Stupe accompanying him.

"It looks as if we are off to a good start," Meetz said. "As you know, I wish to leave as much of the responsibility in your hands as you want. The wildernesses are vast on this planet. It is no cinch, losing yourself in uncharted lands on a search of this kind. You know my function. I am to keep this party ready for your service, so that you will have as much freedom of locomotion as possible. Today with your permission I'll plan to stay right here and get things organized."

An hour later, by their Venus twelve-hour watches, Stupe and five others took to the air.

From the air they looked back upon the Venusian capital. The pink light of dawn revealed it to be a city of domes and towers covering a fifteen mile square of land. To the north (as judged by the rising sun) stretched the open sea, an endless expanse of misty blue. From the beach southward to the distant hills the land rose in a gentle slope.

"If those pavements are smooth," Hefty observed, looking down through binoculars, "I'll bet the kids can put on roller skates and coast all the way across the city, right down to the water."

"So they have roller skates on Venus?" Velma Stevens asked.

"Do they have kids on Venus, that's the question," said her sister Thelma.

"They gotta have kids," said Hefty. "You know that. How could the city go on if they didn't have kids?"

"All right," said Velma. "Wherever there's kids, there's gotta be roller skates too."

THE city was lost from view. White ribbons of highway circled along the foothills. Villages appeared and disappeared swiftly whenever the plane followed at low altitude above the highways.

Rising to twenty-five thousand feet, following a southeasterly course, they looked down upon a mountain range. Jagged peaks threw long blue shadows to the west. The red dawn turned to yellow and the vast continent spread before them like a gigantic well-lighted map.

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"Another sea!" Hefty exclaimed, looking far to the south.

"That's what we're after," said Stupe. "Bear to the right, Velma."

"Yes, you take in the sights while I do the work," Velma said. "There's no justice."

The Stevens sisters were like that, Stupe decided. Always playing that they were getting the small end of any bargain. Probably it didn't mean anything. No doubt about it, Velma was right on her job, and she was handling the plane without one wasted motion.

Dr. Jabetta, as silent as any person in the party, busied himself with a pair of field glasses. Stupe was surprised and pleased that the doctor had been sufficiently interested to come along.

"What do you see, Dr. Jabetta?"

"Land and water," the doctor replied dryly and went on looking.

"What do you see, Hefty?"

Stupe got no reply from Hefty, however. Everyone was so much absorbed in watching the gradual approach of the Southeast Ocean—as it was designated on the map—that Stupe could only follow suit.

But at the same time he kept an eye on the pilot. And all the while he was wondering what thoughts were in the minds of Hefty and the others—especially Dr. Jabetta.

What a wonderful coincident it would be, Stupe thought, if this very first excursion should bring success. A coincident, but not an impossibility.

"If no planes have roared over this land for months," Stupe said to himself, "who knows? The girl might be riding through the water at this very hour. If we should see her—"

His thoughts were interrupted by a very pointed question from Hefty.

"Stupe, old man—" That "old man" meant that Hefty was about to ask a favor.

"Well?"

"How much of a cut do I get if I spot the prize for you?"

"Do you think you've got a lucky pair of eyes?" Stupe said.

"I can spot a frog's hair at thirty paces."

"You're good," said Stupe. "I'll bet you can spot a guinea pig's tail at three miles. I'll bet you can look in a mirror and see the little man that wasn't all there."

"Anyway, if I see a white object out there in the waves, I'll put it in my bill."

"And if that object turns out to be a white rock sticking up out of the water, we'll name it Hefty's Island and set you down on it."

"Quit elbowin'," Hefty said. "I'm busy lookin' for a prize."

FOR two or three minutes no one spoke. Everyone watched the coastline intently. The spray of waves against the rocks could be discerned as the plane drew nearer. Dr. Jabetta broke the silence with four low spoken words.

"We might see her."

It has begun, Stupe thought. With such high stakes to play for, it was inevitable that there would arise a tension of jealousy. Dr. Jabetta wanted to be first to sight the object of their search. Hefty wanted to be first. Thelma Stevens was watching so anxiously that she refused to speak. Her sister at the controls was chafing under the burden of duties. And there was that enigmatic Frenchman, passing from one window to another, looking over the other's shoulders, wishing someone would offer him some binoculars.

For the first time Stupe began to wonder whether that million-dollar offer might turn out to be something less than

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an unadulterated blessing. Every other member of the party had come on flat rate of pay, a lump sum plus a *per diem*. He alone had taken the assignment as a gamble.

Stupe's eyes lingered on the stony features of Dr. Jabetta. The doctor was a very cool man, sallow complexioned, black-haired, so very restrained in his manners that one could seldom guess what he was thinking. Nor could Stupe be sure, even now, that the doctor was as completely absorbed in the search as he pretended to be. There was room in his finely shaped head for many thoughts, and he might be imagining, for all Stupe knew, what a fortune in medicine could be made by the doctors who established themselves early in this rapidly growing American colony.

And what was Frenchy thinking? Those daredevil eyes were looking far without the benefit of binoculars, Stupe thought. They were seeing somewhere beyond the immediate coastline—perhaps to the award that was promised to Stupe. What would happen to that million if Stupe were to lose his life before the hour of success? Would Frenchy and the doctor and the Stevens sisters and Captain Meetz's ambitious young secretary Dick Bracket all leap like wolves for their share? And Hefty? And the captain himself?

"Anything can happen in this Venusian wilderness," Stupe said to himself. "Unless Hefty and I watch our steps, our lives aren't worth more than one good splash in the Southeast Ocean."

CHAPTER V

SHORTLY after his luncheon hour the American Ambassador called for his red and silver car and rode out to the spaceship. There he found Captain Meetz checking over the equipment.

"Would you like to take a little drive with me, Captain? Get in and we'll ride once around the city."

Meetz, smiling, gave a gesture of despair over disorderly heaps of baggage that had been piled on the ground. "You see what a mess I'm in."

"Can't you leave that work to an assistant? I hoped to talk with you. Who is your second in command?"

"Must we be technical about rank? Stupe Smith is of course the ranking officer. Then, there's my personal assistant, Dick Bracket. Both of them are already off on a flight."

"Are you sure about Bracket?"

"What do you mean?"

"Venusian Police Headquarters just called me," said the ambassador. "Your man Bracket has been hailed into court. He would like for you to come down and straighten things up."

"Bracket? I thought he—"

"You *did* think that Bracket went up in the plane with the others this morning? He told you he was going?" The ambassador watched Meetz's reaction sharply. "Because *if* he did, then his actions become more than ever suspicious."

The captain paused for an answer. "No, I am probably mistaken. I jumped to the conclusion that Bracket had gone in the plane. But he didn't tell me he was going. What is the charge against him? Nothing serious, I'm sure.

"Come along and we'll see."

The captain left a few orders with the Fiddle brothers, then drove away with the ambassador for a bout with the Venusian police.

"Now whaddye make of that?" said the elder Fiddle. "That goldarned Dick Bracket has run off and got himself in trouble the first morning."

"He's a queer one," said Jake. "I

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don't mind workin' for Captain Meetz, and I don't mind Stupe Smith. But I don't understand that guy Bracket."

"I don't like the way he gives orders."

"An' he's always trying to push us around. Even you, Bull, and you must outweigh him two to one."

"I weigh two hundred forty," said the elder Fiddle. "You're short changin' him. He tips the scales at a hundred sixty."

"I figure he's got it in for Stupe. You notice the way he'd keep watchin' Stupe outa the corner of his eyes all the way up here? Stupe 'ud be readin' a book or studyin' his maps, not payin' any attention to anyone—"

"What I noticed was that whenever any of those Stevens gals made a play for Stupe, Dick 'ud always happen to walk in and start tellin' one of his funny stories. He does git off some good stories, though, you gotta hand it to him. Those Stevens gals go for that."

A feminine voice from inside the spaceship intruded at this juncture. "Did I hear my name mentioned?"

Selma Stevens came through the open air locks and down the portable steps. The men had forgotten that she had been working over the books in the ship's office.

"It was a polite conversation," said Jake. "Don't act insulted. We was just wondering whether you're gonna fall for one of those sissies like Dick or the doctor or Stupe Smith, or whether you'll go for the real stuff like Bull and me."

"I wouldn't lose any sleep over it," said Selma. "Where's the boss?"

"Gone to town with the ambassador."

"The dog. Sightseeing, Huh? Why didn't he take me along?"

"Dick got pinched. He's gone to bail him out."

"Oh." Selma repeated the comment with a rising inflection. "Oh-h?" Then, as if the situation came upon her in a new light, she added, "Well, that's just fine. So the cat's away."

JAKE nudged his brother. "How'd you like to be a mouse."

"Don't get me wrong," said Selma. "You boys are in charge of a lot of goods, and I can see you're occupied for the afternoon. But I happen to have the afternoon off, and the mechanics have just phoned me that our second plane has been assembled and is warming up for a test flight. I think I'll take a nice little joyride high over the capital."

"I'm in the mood for a ride myself," said Bull. "Jake, you can watch the goods."

"Listen, we're supposed to get this stuff sorted in three lots before evening."

"Okay, Jake, go to work."

"You go to the devil. Selma asked me—"

"She asked me."

"Why you dogs, stop your growling. I didn't ask either of you." Selma turned and walked away as fast as she could go. The Fiddle brothers followed after her, wrangling, half in fun, half seriously. She laughed, telling herself that she didn't care a snap of the fingers for either of them. The mechanics taxied the plane around the field to meet her. The brothers were still following.

"Go on back to your baggage, you wolves. If anything happened to it—"

"What you worrying about? Aren't the people honest in Venus?" Jake retorted. "Aren't all these American colonists handpicked, graded, and sorted, and labelled with blue ribbons? How about it, monkey?"

Jake directed the question to the American mechanic.

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The fellow answered slowly, in a thin drawl, as if his suggestion were quite casual.

"You'd better watch your goods, buddy. I see a flock of wingmen are takin' a fancy to it."

Selma, Jake, and Bull all turned to look back at the parked spaceship about a hundred yards distant. What they saw made their eyes open wide. A flock of a dozen or more winged men, brown skinned, half clad, dipped down out of the air, their huge five-foot wings flapping noisily as they landed. They pounced upon the packages like so many giant gulls snatching for fish.

"Robbers! Thieves! Get away, goldarn you!" Bull Fiddle yelled. For a second he and his brother stood in their tracks as if paralyzed. Then they beat the dust as hard as they could go. But before they could reach the ship, the winged humans flapped away, carrying with them all the plunder they could handle.

"There!" Bull Fiddle growled. "I told you you should have stayed on the job. Now see what you've done."

"Yeah," said Jake, "you and me both."

CHAPTER VI

J. J. WELLINGTON paced the floor of his private study. Each time he passed the four-foot globe of the planet Venus, his puffy fingers flicked against the surface to keep it whirling. His servant entered with a tray and he took a drink.

"Are you feeling better, Mr. Wellington?"

"I'm feeling fine. Why shouldn't I?"

"I thought perhaps you were worried, Mr. Wellington."

"Me? Worried? Certainly not. Oh, by the way, has any mail come in from Venus yet?"

"It's like I told you this morning, Mr. Wellington, the regular Venus Clipper doesn't arrive until next week. You really shouldn't expect any mail until—"

"Oh, get out, stupid, and leave me alone. Can't you see I'm busy?"

The phone rang. It was a certain psychiatrist whom Wellington had employed privately.

"Oh, yes, Dr. Steenman, I hoped you would call today. Have you been following Mr. Vest? . . . Good. What news? . . . Nothing of interest, eh? You attended his interviews with the press? What was your opinion? . . . Too early to draw any conclusions, eh? All right, we'll wait until next week . . ."

The American Ambassador on the planet Venus brought Captain Meetz and his errant assistant back to their hotel and returned to his office. The desk was stacked with unfinished business, but he found himself in a restless mood. It was late afternoon. The sunlight was growing red over the Venusian capital. It was the time of day that the ambassador liked to take his family for a drive. But this evening he preferred to drive alone.

"Now, why," he asked himself, as he skimmed along the highway, "did that young Dick Bracket take such a strange turn? Why did he take the chance of trespassing on forbidden grounds in the first twenty-four hours of his visit to this land?"

The red and silver car floated along noiselessly up the gentle grade to the south. There was little traffic on the road, for the automobile invasion of Venus was still in its infancy. The majority of American settlers lived in the Venusian capital, the one great city of

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this region. One small auto manufacturing plant had been established a few years ago, and it supplied those settlers of the outlying districts with trucks. A few cars came from the earth by space freight, but in general, as the ambassador often oberved to earth visitors, the market in this land for American made vehicles was tremendous.

And yet, for some strange reason that Ambassador Francis Jewell did not quite understand, the people who had transplanted themselves from the Earth to Venus were content to do without many of the gadgets and mechanical advantages they had formerly enjoyed.

"Perhaps it is the mild, satisfying climate," he had sometimes decided. "Perhaps it is the pink dawns and the deep blue shadows at sunset. Or perhaps it is the contentment that comes from knowing that a whole vast undeveloped planet is theirs to enjoy. No one need be crowded. Except for a few minor annoyances from those predatory winged men that live across the Divide, there is little to fear or dread."

THIS condition of space and plenty was something that he often contrasted in his mind with the congested state of affairs that prevailed in many parts of earth's civilization. Even on the wide deserts of the Earth, he remembered, the square miles were blocked out so that they definitely belonged to someone or other.

He drove farther than he had intended, this evening, for his thoughts had been locked by the puzzle of this new American expedition, its strange mission—a millionaire's whim, apparently: the curious earnestness of the young explorer Smith, the slightly lackadaisical management of Captain Meetz; and above all, the inexplicable conduct of young Dick Bracket.

Bracket had given his age as twenty-five. He was a sandy haired chap with quick brown eyes, a sensitive face, and a clever tongue.

"What were you doing there in the arsenal?" the police officer had asked him when Meetz and Ambassador Jewell had arrived to review the case.

The boy had replied, "How did I know it was an arsenal? I've never been here before."

"The building is plainly marked. If you read English, you must have known."

"I came along to see the sights," Dick Bracket had replied. "I got up before daybreak this morning because I was eager to see this city straight through the day. I wanted to see it come to life at dawn. I wanted to know whether the Venus milkmen were as noisy as the ones back in Kansas City. I wanted to know whether there were hardboiled streetcar conductors that yelled at you—"

"That's all very interesting, young man, but why did you enter that arsenal?"

"Curiosity. That's all. I wanted to walk into every building that was open, just to see what there is to see."

At this point the ambassador had added a quetion. "Didn't you know that the American embassy would treat your whole party to a tour?"

"I wanted to get ahead of the others."

"Oh."

A certain wordless communication had flashed between Captain Meetz and his assistant then. The ambassador had caught it, and it had echoed back to trouble him.

"So you wanted to get ahead of the others . . . And they found you in the arsenal, counting the rifles and inspecting the six big guns."

"Only six?" the boy had come back like a snapping whip. Then Captain

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Meetz had taken over.

"Dick, this was a mistake. I believe it was due to thoughtlessness on your part. And too much curiosity. I am convinced that you are honest in stating that you simply wanted to see everything. I know that you couldn't have had any particular motive in examining the weapons of defense that belong to this capital. Am I right?"

"You're always right." The boy had smiled.

Ambassador Jewell had gestured to the police officer. There was no use making a mountain out of a molehill. And so the case had been dismissed.

All at once Ambassador Jewell was jerked out of his thoughts by a very curious sight—A chase was taking place right over the hill-tops. A group of about a dozen winged men were flying at top speed. They were being pursued by a red and blue airplane.

"My stars!" Ambassador Jewell cried. "What goes on?"

He jammed on the brakes and stopped just in time to see the formation of birdmen break up. The winged creatures were clever, all right. At once twelve or fourteen of them were going in twelve or fourteen different directions. The big plane couldn't possibly double back quickly enough to match their dodging. The best it could do was to try to follow one of them, and just as it was about to overtake its quarry, the winged fellow deftly dropped to the ground for a landing. By this time the rest of the gang reformed and drew the plane off in another direction.

"My stars!" the ambassador repeated. "Captain Meetz can't allow this to go on. We'll have more grief from those wingmen now than ever."

He turned his car around in the middle of the highway and sped back to the capital at full speed.

CHAPTER VII

STUPE SMITH with his party returned to the landing field just as the sun was setting. Against the flaming sky he saw another red and blue plane descending, and at once he understood. That would be Selma Stevens returning from a test flight.

"There's good news, Hefty," he observed. "That means we'll be ready to take off with both planes early tomorrow morning."

Hefty gave a surprised grunt. "Don't we even get a day to look over the city?"

"We'll paint the town after we win our prize," Stupe said.

Hefty might have known. His boss was all business. Work first, pleasure afterward—that had been Stupe's policy on the rescue trip in the Andes and on a previous adventure over the Arctic.

"So we pick up and move at dawn tomorrow," Hefty agreed without argument. "You think our dear captain will have everything ready?"

Stupe gave a confident toss of his head. "Meetz says he's ready to back me in any plan I recommend."

At the dinner table that night all of the party were assembled and for half an hour they thought of nothing but the delights of Venus foods. Stupe was confident that everything was getting off to a good start, though he had not yet sprung his news about tomorrow's move.

The spaceship had been rolled into a hangar that afternoon. The two planes were being serviced and loaded with the first batch of goods—that share of it which the wingmen had not stolen.

A strange mood of silence held sway tonight over the Fiddle brothers and their confidante, Selma. The daylight robbery would be a black mark on their

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record, they knew, if the story got out. But they believed that Selma wouldn't tell. Perhaps it would be days before the goods were missed.

"I can be as innocent as an angel," Jake had whispered just before dinner. "But you, Bull, you've been wearin' that guilty look ever since you stole sugar from mom's cupboard."

"As an angel, you're about as innocent as one of those devilish winged men," Bull retorted.

The two Stevens girls who had flown with Stupe were full of lively chatter about their day's adventure.

"You should have been along, Sis," they said to Selma. "What are you so quiet about?"

Selma dodged the question. The truth was, her brain was still whirling over the afternoon's chase. She had intended only to follow those winged robbers far enough to see where they hid the goods, but the chase had turned out badly for her. One by one, they had succeeded in breaking away from the flock, each to hide his share of the loot among the wooded hillsides. The more they had eluded her, the angrier she had grown. At last she had headed her plane straight for them, fully intending to knock a few of them down.

And then it had happened. A highway had come into view unexpectedly, and there, five hundred feet beneath her, she had seen that certain red and silver car. The ambassador's. Had he seen *her?*

At the close of dinner Stupe Smith rose and tapped his glass for attention. Briefly he outlined his plan of action. His words, Hefty thought, were more than eloquent. They were a promise of swift achievement. And they were a supreme bid for cooperation.

"Every word and every action of Captain Meetz convinces me," Stupe said, smiling toward the man who was technically his superior, "that I will have every ounce of support I need. We are off to a perfect start. So far as I know not one thing has happened to mar our record of good conduct."

HE PAUSED, taking in everyone's gaze. He thought that Selma Stevens winced under the quick glance from one of the Fiddle brothers.

"My plan for tomorrow is to set up a camp on the shore of the Southeast Ocean, half a day's flight from this capital The site has already been selected —a green valley about two thousand miles from here. This will give us a base of operations much nearer the region that Mr. Vest is believed to have visited. Captain Meetz, does this plan meet with your approval?"

The captain gave an enthusiastic, "Yes, yes. Most assuredly."

"There is one difficulty we may encounter," Stupe went on. "Beyond the Divide we ran across many bands of men with wings. We sighted several thousand of these—great brown flocks of them flying low over the hilltops. They may give us trouble. But if we don't trouble them first they may not bother us."

"Ugh!" Bull Fiddle said, as if something had kicked him in the stomach. His involuntary ejaculation caused everyone to turn, and he was forced to say something. He faltered. "Did you say *men with wings?"*

Jake, at his side, nudged him and tried to take the awkward situation out of his hands.

"We can shoot 'em, can't we?" Jake blurted. "I mean if they come around stealing or something."

At this suggestion everyone around the table began talking in the low tones of suppressed excitement. Stupe rapped for order. At that moment Am-

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bassador Jewell entered, looking very grave. The room went silent.

"Captain Meetz . . . Mr. Smith . . . Members of the Wellington expedition . . ."

The ambassador tall and austere advanced to the table slowly. There was an alarming light in his eyes, Stupe thought. Something must have happened.

"I have come to give you a word of warning. Are all of your members present, Captain Meetz?"

The captain counted fourteen persons including himself. "All present," he said.

"Good. What I have to tell you will not be pleasant. But it is for your own good." The ambassador signalled someone at the door. "Bring in our exhibit A, please."

Two attendants wheeled a white skeleton into the room. It had been wired to a dark metal frame, mounted on a three-wheeled base. Towering six and a half feet from toes to forehead, its chalky bones shuddered weirdly as it moved up to the table.

"Wings!" someone exclaimed.

The skeleton was almost, but not quite human. Skull, ribs, pelvic boines, arms and legs—these parts were familiar. But in addition there were the bony frames of two outspread wings.

"Yes wings," said the ambassador solemnly. "This is the skeleton of a very famous wingman. I have not come to tell you the story of his dramatic life and death. I am showing him to you for a very important reason. Please attend my words carefully."

The ambassador waited until the room was deathly still. From somewhere outside the room could be heard soft foot-falls—servants, Stupe supposed, listening at the doors.

"This skeleton was given us by the wingmen themselves as a gift—*a gift of bitterness—a gift that symbolized their distrust of us*. For this wingman was murdered in the streets of this city by a visiting American. It was an unprovoked murder. I want to warn you that wingmen have heads and hearts, the same as you and I. They do not easily forget."

STUPE was thinking fast. There was a tension in the air that he couldn't understand. Had something gone wrong?

The ambassador's voice was suddenly husky with repressed anger.

"Today—your first day on this planet—you have already broken the peace. One of you—or some of you—I do not know which ones—have already—"

The ambassador stopped. Selma Stevens had risen from the table and was walking, almost running, toward the door. Her surprised sisters tried to stop her. What was the matter?

"Let me go," she cried. "I'm ill. Let me—"

"Wait!" the ambassador shouted, and his voice struck with a weight of authority that fairly paralyzed everyone. "Wait. You're going to hear what I have to say."

Selma's sisters led her back to her seat. She was pale, trembling.

"Before I tell you what has happened," again the ambassador's voice was low and controlled, "let me give you a stern warning about the use of firearms. These winged men know practically nothing about guns. Except for their remembrance of one tragic incident—" he gestured to the winged skeleton—"they have had no contact with firearms. As long as they remain in their present state of innocence they offer no menace. Occasionally they come over the Divide. Sometimes we find them lurking around our windows

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or on our rooftops. They will steal—yes, indeed. So do not leave any baggage lying around in open spaces where it can be seen from the air."

The Fiddle brothers were mumbling something in confidence. The ambassador stopped, waiting for cold silence, then went on.

"They steal your *words*, too. They're not dumb. Don't underestimate their wits. They live as primitively as any ancient caveman, but they have been quick to seize upon our language. But I'm warning you, I do not mean to have trouble with them over these trifles. There are millions of them to thousands of us. The planet was theirs before it was ours. And so we have established an iron-bound code. An iron-bound code, my friends. For our own welfare as well as theirs. *It is a criminal act for anyone to commit an act of aggression against a wingman.*"

Ambassador Jewell struck the table with his doubled fist.

"Moreover, it is a criminal act for anyone to demonstrate the use of firearms or exhibit firearms in any way within sight of these creatures. And now—"

Again the ambassador's voice choked with ill-suppressed fury.

"Let me tell you what happened today. One of you—or some of you—"

A scream from somewhere outside the dining room cut his speech short.

Instantly a side door swung open and banged against the wall. That was the least dangerous of the ten or twelve banging noises that followed one another in rapid succession. Into the room they came—three winged men, jumping, flapping their wings, and *shooting!*

EACH of the three had a small black automatic pistol. The bullets whizzed in all directions. A picture on the wall went down with a crash of glass. Captain Meetz went down with a terrible groan. The three pairs of big brown wings seemed to be everywhere at once as the creatures charged over the table with their bare feet, and ran from one corner of the room to another.

One of them flapped past the chandelier and knocked down a shower a glass trinkets. He struck the ceiling with a thud, for he had been fascinated by the musical clinking, had looked back and momentarily forgot that there was not an open sky overhead. He flopped downward, thrown off balance, and Stupe Smith leaped for him. The fists flew. The wingman's pistol dropped from his hand. Stupe kicked it into the corner, at the same time following through with a hard right to the winged fellow's solar plexus. The wings sagged and the figure slumped.

The girls were screaming. One of them had been hit.

Stupe turned in time to see Captain Meetz raising his own pistol to shoot. He aimed for a wingman's heart. The ambassador took two strides to the fallen captain and gave his arm a savage kick. Another pistol bumped to the floor.

It was little Hefty Winkle who came through with the hidden wallop. A right, a left, and a right to the biggest wingman's midsection. As the fellow staggered backward, Stupe saw a flash of terror in his very human face. A heavy-boned, dark face it was, with a beak-shaped nose and eyebrows of coarse string-like hair. The terror in the whites of the fellow's eyes came from his anticipation of falling *upon his wings.*

"There's his weakness," Stupe thought. "Those wings—"

But the fellow recovered himself and

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ran for the door. One of the trio had already gotten his fill and chased away. With a rapid thump of bare hands and feet, the third picked himself up from the floor and bounded through another door just as Frenchy flung a knife.

The room was such a scene of wreckage as no American ambassador to the peaceful colony of Venus had ever imagined. Two persons—Captain Meetz and Selma Stevens—had been hurt by the flying bullets. Selma's forehead had been grazed, and she had been shot through the arm. The captain had caught a bullet in the back. How badly he was hurt no one knew.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT night within two hours after the dining room "massacre" five members of the party took off for the Southeast Ocean.

Velma, at the controls, found an altitude of twenty thousand feet and set the plane on a straight course.

"If you ask me," she said, "Ambassador Jewell was worse hurt than anyone. Figuratively, I mean. Did you see him pacing back and forth? *'How did they get the guns?'* he kept saying. *'How did they get the guns?'*"

"Well, how *did* they?" Hefty demanded. "It's a cinch they didn't get them from us. Our firearms were all packed away in our baggage."

"How they got the guns is the ambassador's problem," said Frenchy. "It's none of our affair. But what I want to know is, why did they start in on us? What have we done to them? You don't suppose just because we flew over the Divide yesterday—"

"No," said Stupe. "They had no reason to be offended over that, in the first place. They couldn't have known it was us in the second place. They could have followed us all the way back to the capital—you know that. It had to be some local band of prowlers."

"Maybe they've got some way of sending messages. The ambassador said they were smart. Maybe some of the Southeast Ocean tribes telephoned or radioed back to a tribe that hides somewhere around the Venus capital—?"

"Radioed?" said Frenchy. "Do they have radios?"

"Who knows?" said Hefty.

"Well, I'd say it isn't likely," said Frenchy. "Folks that go around barefooted and half naked and don't even wear wristwatches aren't going to be setting up telephones or radio sets."

"I don't know," said Hefty. "Stupe and I ran across some Hottentots down in the Solomon Islands—"

"They were bushmen," Stupe corrected.

The discussion was full of puzzling angles. No one knew what the limitations of the winged creatures might be. It was certain that they possessed a lively human curiosity about American gadgets, judging by the dramatic way they had chosen to experiment with those pistols.

"They talk American and they shoot pistols," said Velma. "What have we got that they haven't?"

"Our wings have motors," said Stupe. "How's our distance? Are we going to reach our destination before sun-up?"

"Vat's der matter, Meester Smeeth?" Gypsy Brown asked. "You geeting hungry already yet?"

Stupe laughed. "To tell the truth, I am, Gypsy. But I thought you were asleep."

"How could anyvun sleep afder all dot excitement?" Gypsy said. Then she lay back in her seat, her face half buried in the pillow. Sometimes her slow breathing almost became snoring, and the party might believe her to be

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sound asleep. Then suddenly her large brown eyes would pop open and she would add some comment in her rich deep voice to the passing conversation.

SHE was a woman of perhaps fifty, large and powerful, and reputedly an excellent cook. She had been called "Gypsy" as long as she could remember, she had explained, because as a child she had belonged to one of the roving gypsy bands that populated the war wildernesses that had once been Europe.

"It vas vun good argument you must have gif dot ambassador," she said sleepily, "to let us fly avay, after all dot trouble."

"The ambassador is a square shooter," said Stupe. "All I had to do was prove to him that none of us could have been mixed up in anything wrong."

He might have added that he had grave suspicion that *some* of the party were less innocent. He had decided that whatever had started the trouble, it must have begun locally.

"It wasn't our excursion over the Divide that did it," he said to himself. "And there weren't any signals flashing back over those thousands of miles to spark off the violence."

The more he thought, the more certain he became on this point. Someone at the capital must have crossed the wingmen's path somehow. And the ambassador must have known it. Twice in his after-dinner talk, Stupe recalled, the ambassador had started to make a direct charge against some member or members of the expedition.

Putting two and two together, he decided that Selma's illness had been feigned. She must have been afraid of something the ambassador almost revealed.

Selma's narrow escape from death was a matter that weighed upon Velma's mind.

"I can't understand why they wasted any shots on her," Velma said, now looking off through the darkness, searching for the first streaks of morning light. "A whole roomful of us and they nicked her twice. What's she got that I haven't got?"

"You were under the table," said Hefty. "I remember distinctly."

"How did you know, Smarty? You must have been there, too."

Hefty admitted that he would have been if he hadn't landed that right hook at the crucial moment.

Dawn was just over the horizon. Breakfast, too, Stupe thought, although by now Gypsy Brown was sleeping in earnest.

Sunrise began with a narrow rim of the red sky over the level surface of the ocean, from south to southeast to east, there to widen into a flaming banner.

On to the northeast the silhouette of dark mountains rose to black out the line of red. Now the plane was crossing the thirteen fingers of land that extended out into the sea. Stupe remembered them from the previous day's exploration. He was already beginning to feel at home in this world.

The map which the ambassador had supplied was much more detailed than the crude sketch which Mr. Vest had drawn for J. J. Wellington. In comparing the two, Stupe and Hefty had noted in each the slight resemblance of the shore line to the profile of a man. A rather freakish man, to be sure.

The two hands extended from the chest, which was in reality a high plateau. The thirteen very irregular peninsulas spread out into the sea like fingers from these hands.

Farther east the contour of the shoreline curved northward in a round shoulder. This had proved to be a sloping

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plain extending from the sea northward about eighty miles to the backbone of the mountain range.

"That's where we landed yesterday," Hefty said to Stupe, pointing to the ambassador's map.

Stupe smiled. It had been a tense hour crossing those rugged fingers the day before, wondering whether there would be a suitable landing place beyond. The southern curve of the plain would be the perfect site for their camp today. What sort of terrain lay beyond?

According to the two maps, the mountains came down to the sea again east of the "shoulder" to form the face of the silhouetted figure. That would be rugged country, no doubt. Mr. Vest had believed, though his memory had not been clear on this point, that the sea-dwelling beauty would be found in that region. It was Stupe's purpose to locate another landing base on the "chin" if possible.

Velma brought them down to a three-point landing on the solid gravel within a few yards of the water's edge.

"Breakfast!" Hefty shouted, striding back through the plane to Gypsy Brown's seat. "Everybody out for breakfast . . . Well, what do you know, the cook's still sound asleep."

Gypsy Brown raised her eyebrows but could not quite open her eyes. "Vot's all der noise aboudt? Vare's der fire?"

"Right under the skillet, sister. Are you mixin' the flapjacks or will I have to do it?"

Gypsy turned away from him, yawning, one eye opened.

"Sleep, sleep, sveet sleep. It's *vunderful.*" The eye closed again.

"Tell me what to do and I'll mix the dough for you," said Hefty.

Gypsy was talking in her sleep, no doubt about it. "Fourteen cups of flour, mix up mit fife quarts uff milk, pour in two gallons uff gasoline. Den beat vell mit der vings of four wingmen, und if der vings don't stop beating, crawl under der table und shoot to kill."

Hefty chuckled. "Sleep, it's *vunderful,* she says."

AMBASSADOR JEWELL glanced at his watch. It was high noon. The Venus Clipper would leave for the earth in just an hour.

"Are you ready to dictate that letter now?" his secretary asked.

"Come back in ten minutes, please."

The ambassador looked out upon the landing field. A few items of freight were being loaded into the huge brown hulk that would soon rocket off into the sky. The most important package would be the mailbag, of course. Each week, two or three thousand pieces of mail flew back and forth between the planets. No doubt Mr. Wellington of New York would expect an official communication when this ship landed. But Ambassador Jewell was not ready to give his whole-hearted endorsement of the Wellington expedition. Not yet. Too many things had gone wrong during these first two days.

The ambassador went to the telephone.

"Any news from Captain Meetz?"

"I am sorry, sir. Doctor Jabetta says that he is still in a coma."

"Thank you."

The ambassador rang for one of his assistants.

"Have you anything to report on the young man who entered the arsenal?"

"They're keeping a close watch on him, sir. He has been with the rest of the party most of the time. A few minutes ago he was admitted to the captain's room."

"Who admitted him?"

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"Doctor Jabetta."

"Oh?" The ambassador frowned. "That is all."

Again he rang for his secretary.

"All right, I will dictate that letter. 'Dear Mr. Wellington — Your party, under the leadership of Captain Meetz, arrived two days ago without mishap, I am sure you will be pleased to learn. According to the statement of Mr. Smith, the purpose of this expedition is to locate and procure for purposes of entertainment one particular curiosity from this land of ours which abounds in curiosities. A sea-dwelling girl. Whether or not this project will pay you from a financial point of view I cannot say. That, however, is the least of my worries. You have asked for my official approval. In answer, let me state that I have no objection whatever to this declared purpose. However, I am puzzled over certain aspects of the request. Do you believe it necessary to the success of your expedition that Captain Meetz and Mr. Smith be accompanied by so large a party? Also, do you consider it essential to your success that such a large store of equipment be brought? I have asked Captain Meetz for the privilege of inspecting this equipment. So far he has not replied. In fact, in his present state—' "

The secretary waited. "In his present state—"

"No, no, no. That won't do." The ambassador began to pace the floor again. "No, Wellington will have to wait. I have got to get more information—" He waved the secretary out. He put on his coat and hat. The hotel where the party was staying was only a few steps away.

"Which is the Captain's room, please? Is the doctor there too? What about visitors? Never mind, I am going up anyway."

The door of Captain Meetz's room was closed. The ambassador hesitated. The voices from within could be heard dimly. The captain and his young assistant were talking in low tones.

"Have you checked the equipment carefully?" the captain was saying.

"Here's a list of what I found." This from Dick Bracket. The ambassador remembered the voice.

"If you're sure—" The captain broke off. He changed his tone. "It isn't safe to talk here. Come back."

The ambassador was in a quandary. He would not like to be found eavesdropping. Yet he was consumed with curiosity over what was very evidently a guarded conversation. He rapped at the door.

Silence. Then footsteps. The door opened a few inches. Dick Bracket looked out, his eyes showing the faintest gleam of surprise. He spoke in a low voice, almost a whisper.

"Oh, it's you. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you. I'd like a few words with the captain," the ambassador said gravely.

"I'm sorry," the young man said. "Doctor Jabetta advised me that he is in a coma. I'm afraid he's sound asleep just now. You've come at a rather bad time."

"Yes, a very bad time." The ambassador edged into the room, though Dick seemed to be blocking his path. "Sound asleep, isn't he? *If* he were awake I would tell him that I have *not* written the official letter to Wellington. The Venus Clipper leaves in a few minutes. But there will be *no* official communication from me—not until I have had a chance to inspect the equipment you have brought. Too bad the captain is asleep."

The ambassador looked for a long moment at Meetz lying there. He was a sick man all right. And his eyes

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were firmly closed. But if he had his wits about him the ambassador's words hadn't been wasted.

CHAPTER X

STUPE persuaded his four companions, much against their wishes, to leave him to his solitude. For a few days he wanted to camp here alone. Hefty had objected almost violently to this plan of action.

"It don't make sense, Stupe," he had said. "Do you remember that white skeleton with the wings? When we come back in a week that's what we'll find here in this cave. Only there won't be any wings attached to your back. There'll just be your bones, picked clean. And your Venus wristwatch—unless those wingmen are in the habit of gathering trophies."

"We'll take that chance," Stupe had said. "There are many reasons—"

For one thing, Stupe knew that Velma was greatly worried about her sister. For another, Stupe himself was worried about the remainder of the party. Those unexplained remarks of the ambassador's kept tantalizing him. Something had happened that he didn't understand. Somehow he would feel safer if Hefty were back there keeping an ear to the ground.

"I'll stay with you," Frenchy had said.

Gypsy Brown had also volunteered to stay. But in the end Stupe had refused.

"The four of you know the lay of the land well enough that you won't have any trouble finding me. I have a feeling there is far more chance of discovering something if the denizens of this region, who may be watching us, see our plane return. For all we know, they may be spying on us this minute."

"They—Who?" Hefty demanded.

"Wingmen. Two-ton snails. Dwellers of the sea. Or any of the curious forms of life we've heard about. After the plane goes I'll stay in here—and maybe they'll come out of hiding."

And so the plane had departed.

Stupe had not intended to sleep. He had hidden himself in a shallow cave in the side of the thirteenth finger. Here he could look out upon the plain which he had designated as the shoulder.

He had spent an hour studying his maps. The warm forenoon sun had brought the relaxation which had been denied him during the tense hours of the night. Finally, he had succumbed to drowsiness and had spread a blanket for a mid-day nap.

Fleeting impressions raced through his mind—scenes that he had only half observed during the recent flights. To his mind's eye there returned the deep blue of the ocean, its slow waves sloshing lazily against the points of the giant fingers of rock. The bright yellow of the sandy beach blazing in the sunlight. The curious reflection of light off the surface of water five or six miles beyond the tenth finger. Strange that he should have seen that reflection twice. Once yesterday noon at the beginning of the flight back to the capital. Once this morning as they were flying into the sunrise.

Could a morning sun and a noon sun cause the same bright yellow reflection from the surface of water?

ALMOST asleep, Stupe opened his eyes with a start. His colored pencils—here they were, lying on the cave floor beside his maps.

He drew a small circle of yellow on one of the maps, a short distance off the coast of the tenth finger.

"It probably won't appear again in a hundred years," he said to himself. "But it will help me remember the lay

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of the land at that point. Like the clouds over that certain peak in the Andes . . ."

And then he drowsed away again. His last thought before he fell asleep was of Gypsy Brown and the comical way she had mixed wings with flour and water in her dream. Strange, what dreams will do . . . Dreams . . .

He tried to awaken. He was sure he was dreaming. He was sure that he had been lying here on the cave floor for two or three hours, for the sun was no longer blazing against his closed eyelids.

He tried to open his eyes, but couldn't . . . The strangest sensation . . . That soft voice . . . It kept whispering . . .

"Keep on sleeping . . . Keep on sleeping . . . Don't wake up . . ."

What a strange voice. . . . Unlike any he had ever heard before . . . Such a curious accent . . .

"Sleep . . . Keep on sleeping . . . Don't awaken or I shall go away . . . Sleeeep. . . ."

It was like a child's impression of some far-off fairyland, Stupe thought. He seemed to be reaching for some unreality, something that was only an image. A mist. A mist of colors that whispered softly and stroked his eyelids. The soft touch of mist upon his eyelids. And that was why his eyelids wouldn't open. The light fairy touch of this misty image kept stroking them, and the fairy voice with that strange accent kept whispering that he mustn't wake up or it would go away.

He breathed deeply. The smell of cool rocks filled his nostrils. His bare elbow, over the edge of the blanket, pressed against the floor of the cave. He moved his arm slowly.

"Do not move . . . Do not waken . . . I shall go away if you do. You must not see me . . ."

And then it seemed that he couldn't move. He could only hear the receding whisper . . .

"Good-bye . . . Perhaps I shall see you again when you sleep . . . Do not waken . . . Not yet . . . Good-bye . . ."

The light footsteps of this fanciful thing of dreams retreated softly. The mist was no longer kissing his eyelids. There were dancing colors, now—a swift series of colored clouds in soft, pastel shades, pink and pale yellow and light blue—blue—deeper, deeper blue—until suddenly his eyes were open and he was looking out at the deep afternoon sky.

"Dreams," he said aloud. At first he wanted to smile over the curious hallucination. But instead he stared at the blue sky for several minutes. He was almost hypnotized, it seemed, by the vividness of his recent impressions. It was not easy to come back to the world of reality at once. Yet the scene before him was, except for the shifting sun, very much as it had been two or three hours before. The waves were still sloshing lazily against the shore, their rhythmic beat sounding vaguely like horses' hoofs.

"Dreams," he repeated, as he shook himself out of his lethargy. "Wouldn't Gypsy Brown laugh if I told her?"

It was time for him to get to work. There was lots to be done. But as he picked up his maps and began studying them, again he was attracted to the beat of the waves against the shore that sounded like hoofbeats. He stood looking out at the sea, deep blue in the afternoon light. He dropped the maps, raised his arms slowly, and with the tips of his fingers touched his eyelids. That strange sensation. He wondered . . .

CHAPTER XI

THE sky did not turn red with the glow of a sunset that night. Late

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in the afternoon dark clouds rolled over the mountains, and the sullen roar of thunder echoed down to the sea.

Nestled in his shallow cave in the east slope of the thirteenth finger, Stupe gazed out upon the approaching storm.

"I wish I were on top of this mountain," he said, talking audibly to himself. "If I knew there weren't any wingmen around to see me—"

He would have liked a lookout post from which he could look to the west as well as the east. Tomorrow, if nothing prevented, he would hike back over the mountainous ridges.

"How many fingers could I pass in a day?" he wondered.

Picking up the map, he was at first only half aware that something had been changed. Had some color been added?

"Here's fifteen miles," he was saying. "And that's a good half day's hike over rough country. Half a day to cross around the fiord to the twelfth finger. Another twenty miles would take me around the eleventh to the base of the tenth. The tenth—"

He stopped, staring at the map. He was looking at the small circle he had drawn, half an inch beyond the end of the tenth finger. He had drawn it with a *yellow* pencil because it represented a reflection of yellow light he had seen on the waves. But it was changed.

"Now who did that?"

He spoke the words aloud, as if he expected someone to answer. Instead of one circle there were now *three concentric circles* on the map.

The center one was yellow. Around it was an orange *circle.* Surrounding it, a circle of *red.*

"Who—" Stupe reached for his pistol. The action was automatic, a first impulse in answer to this strange situation. He restrained his hand as it pressed against the well filled holster. If someone was nearby, watching him, the danger was at least no greater now than it had been. To reach for a weapon would only intensify any invisible peril.

Was some visitor lurking near the cave? Had someone come and gone while he slept, only to add two colored circles to this map?

Stupe's eyes combed every detail in and around the shallow twenty-foot cave. There was no one about. Nor could one other clue be found that betokened a visitor.

"I'm groggy from sleep," he said finally. "I must have put those circles there myself."

Then the vividness of his dream swept over him again and he wondered. He touched his eyelids, just as the *dream* had done. A little of the *mist* feeling was still there. He looked at his fingertips. Little touches of pinkish white dust were on them.

Pinkish white powder.

It was like the dust from the petal of a flower. He touched his eyelids again. A little more of the dust clung to his fingertips.

He stared, utterly mystified. All he could say was, "D r e a m dust . . . Dream dust . . . And all the time she was whispering . . ."

FOR several minutes he sat, pondering the mystery. Then a great roar of thunder shook him out of his reverie and he laughed at himself.

"I must be balmy to let a dream run away with me."

The storm was coming on rapidly. To the north he could see the purple curtain of rain moving down over the dark green mountain sides. He began moving his equipment back into the inner corners of the cave. The floor was dry warm earth, but he could see

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that it had been beaten and packed by previous rain and windstorms. It was well to prepare for the worst.

The most important thing was to fasten some protection over the six-foot entrance. The small canvas tent he had brought filled the bill. He drove stakes into the cracks between stones and fastened the canvas to them.

Next, he picked up several loose rocks and stacked them to make two dry platforms above the level of the floor, in case the water should beat in. One was for his goods, the other for his bed.

"All right, bring on your storm, Venus," he said aloud, though he could hardly hear himself against the roar of the approaching rain.

A streak of lavender lightning flashed through the sky, and the gray waves to the south were suddenly close and vivid, then gone again.

"If I could only sketch such a picture," Stupe thought.

With his packet of colored crayons and a sketch pad, he sat in the entrance of the cave, the canvas drapery slapping his shoulder.

Another flash of lightning. There was something luminous on his crayons. Pink dust. *Dream dust.* Only now it was glowing faintly. And when the lightning came again, he saw that the dust spots flashed like mirrors.

"On which two pencils?" Stupe was suddenly on fire with excitement. *"Which two?"*

It was dark enough that he applied his flashlight to make sure. Yes, *the orange and the red.*

THAT wasn't all. Stupe was certain, as he examined the pencils by flashlight, that the visitor of his dreams had left not only "dream dust" but also fingerprints.

It was all very curious. A thousand questions fought back and forth in Stupe's mind. Who? What? Why? His guesses only confused him. The mysteries of Venus were playing tricks upon his reason. What were the secrets of this land? What were the rules? How was he to know what was real and what was unreal?

He stared at the purplish black clouds, rolling closer, gathering power as they came.

If he could have had his wish just then, the clouds would have parted to give him a glimpse of the clear sky. Somehow he yearned to know that a certain planet called the earth was still up there somewhere.

But—now the first raindrops came thudding down, beating up a wave of dust, barely visible in the growing darkness.

"Wingmen!"

The lightning highlighted a small flock of flying forms racing down from the northeast. Six or seven of them.

"Trying to outrun the rain!"

The thought was exciting. The opaque curtain of rain was driving them. They were coming fast, all right. The dark blotch was growing.

Another flash. They were coming straight toward him.

"They're after this cave!" Stupe suddenly realized . . . "Of course. They know this spot. They're coming here for shelter."

Raindrops were battering the canvas curtain, its loose ends flapping. Back of it, he watched through a loop, and waited.

Another flash. The six or seven wingmen were just above his door, beating their wings for a landing.

CHAPTER XII

UNTIL he had heard their squawking voices, Stupe did not know

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what he was going to do.

"Veek-lo-grakie-grakie!"

"Kimme - seebo - seebo - vanno-veek-lo!"

Their words were nothing he could understand. But their shrill, clattering tinpan sounds were something to be remembered. On the previous night, when the three angry winged creatures had invaded the dining room, he had caught the weird metallic overtones that had characterized their squawks. Although they had, on that occasion, used some words of English along with their native jabber, their tones had been as different from human voices as a fire gong from cathedral chimes.

They beat the air with their wings, their bare feet thumped to a landing. One of them gave a shrill cry of surprise. He had bumped into the canvas that blocked the way into the cave.

It was then that Stupe, crouched within the canvas curtain, played his strategy.

"Gr-r-rowl-l-l-l!" He yelled with all his voice. "Br-r-our-r-r-uff!"

He rattled the canvas, growling like a mad animal.

"Eee-vee-eek!" One of the wingmen screamed. Or was it a winged woman? Other terrified screeches joined in. Wings beat the air. Male and female voices squawked against the roar of the storm as the whole band of them instantly took to their wings.

Scared out! A loud voice had done it. It might never work again, but it had turned the trick this time. Yes, they were flying away. Stupe watched through a look in the canvas. A flash of lightning highlighted their wet, half-clad bodies.

They were beautiful in flight, Stupe thought. His glimpse of a graceful female flying away with a winged infant in her arms was a picture that stuck in his mind. The little fellow's wings were crushed tight against his mother's body, his shiny knees drawn up against the single arm that held him, his bright eyes were looking down as the ground went spinning away beneath him. His mother's wings stroked wide and full, her stringlike hair blew back from her forehead, her back was arched a trifle like as if in a swan dive.

When the next flash of lightning came, the winged party was out of sight. Stupe wondered. How long had that mother being racing ahead of the storm, carrying her child, trying to reach this very cave before the cloudburst caught her?

THE more he thought of it, the more uncomfortable he felt. Did he have any right to take possession of wingmen's caves? He would return the favor some time he thought.

It was a good cave. It kept him warm and dry through the night until the storm was spent.

The morning sun brought him his first sight of the huge red snails.

"Two-ton snails," the ambassador had called them. "They sleep in the shade in dry weather and go traveling when it rains."

This morning they were traveling. Stupe found it interesting to watch them through his binoculars. He counted more than fifty of them moving along the hillsides. They were going too slowly to be going anywhere, he thought. And much too slowly to make any trouble for a fleet-footed human like himself. Let them go where they pleased, so long as they didn't interfere with his plan to hike over the fingers.

From a distance they showed as shiny red rings of gelatine with white centers.

Later in the day, Stupe came upon three of them at close range. He had slipped along the mountainside from

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one hiding place to another, ever on the watch for wingmen. Coming over a rise, he saw three of the two-ton snails only twenty-five yards ahead of him.

They looked more than ever like immense mounds of red gelatine, each carrying a giant biscuit on top. The cream colored biscuits were shells into which the whole mass of gelatinous substance could draw in case of danger.

But they were slow about drawing into their protective houses, and were therefore easy victims for hungry wingmen.

Stupe ducked for a hiding place. Fifteen wingmen flying in a graceful squadron, swooped down as casually as if for a drink of water. They landed near the three huge snails and each grabbed for himself a handful of the red gelatine. Then they took to the air again, chattering as they went, and munching their food.

"The food problem is simple in this land," Stupe thought.

The shapeless red creatures had evidently felt the attack. For minutes after the wingmen had gone on, the ground creatures were still contracting. When at last all of their gelatinous bodies had been drawn inside their shells, they might have appeared from a distance as three round yellow rocks.

Minutes later they began to come out again, and resumed their slow gliding locomotion.

"No faces, no eyes, no mouth, no arms or legs," Stupe observed. "Just a mass of protoplasm. I wonder what they taste like."

AS THEY moved along they left a trail through the mountain-side vegetation that resembled the path of a seven-foot lawn mower. They were absorbing all the puffy little green plants they encountered evidently digesting them by some simple chemical process.

Stupe's curiosity got the better of him. He ran past the nearest snail and grabbed a handful of its substance. It was cool and sticky to his hand, like red jell. To his taste it was not sweet, as he had somehow expected. The flavor sickened him.

He tried again, three or four times that afternoon, to learn to eat the stuff, but it seemed to act as a poison for him. After losing his food, he made his way back to the cave for several hours of fasting.

He was disappointed. If he could have endured red snail flesh, he would have had no food problem to worry about.

Two days later, as it happened, food became the most important of all problems. For some time during his absence from his cave some winged visitors must have dropped in to pay their respects. And not finding anyone at home they had made away with everything they could find. The food had been hidden well enough, he had believed, but their sense of smell must have led them to it.

Crippled for supplies, Stupe nevertheless embarked on his hike westward toward the tenth finger.

"I'm chasing dreams," he kept telling himself.

There was no longer any luminous dust on his colored pencils. His eyelids had long since lost the touch of mist. There was very little, in fact, to persuade him that it had not all been an elaborate hallucination.

But there were still the colored circles on his map.

It was his purpose to walk far enough to look out upon that spot in the sea again. Two days to go. Two days to return. He should be back by the week's end when the plane was scheduled to arrive again with Hefty and the

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others.

"Hunger, however, has changed many a plan," Stupe Smith said to himself on the afternoon of his second day of hiking.

In his many hours alone, he found it helpful to talk to himself, and he was doing his best to temper his hunger with philosophy.

"Down through the ages hunger has changed the fates of men and nations. Some day it may determine the fates of planets."

He pondered over this as he paced along the mountainside. He had ascended to the crest of the eleventh finger and was following it toward the sea. By night he hoped to reach the point. Then, if he could find food and regain his strength, he might swim across to the tenth point at dawn.

"If earth man can learn to eat the flesh of the giant snails," he continued, "he may readily adapt himself to Venus. But if he can't, the winged men may outlast him in this land. They will borrow his tools and his speech. If they are clever enough to organize in great numbers, they may learn to suppress the powers of earth man and dominate him. If I live to see that day—"

The thought did not appeal to him. The *if* was too painful to consider. He had stumbled twice in the past hour, and not from awkwardness.

Late that night, dead tired and hungrier than he had ever been before in all his twenty-eight years, he discovered quite by accident, a new source of food.

It happened when he tripped and rolled for a short distance down a steep slope. He barked his hand on the root of a tree, and put the injured knuckle to his lips. In doing so he tasted something sweet. A bit of puffy cookie-shaped grass leaf had stuck to his hand.

"It can't be poison," he thought. "Those red snails were eating cookie-grass."

A moment later he was feasting on the same sort of vegetation he had been trampling underfoot all day.

"Food," he murmured philosophically, "can turn the fortunes of men and nations . . . Tomorrow I'll swim across to the tenth finger."

CHAPTER XIII

IT WOULD be approximately a two-mile swim. If Stupe had known that Hefty and two others had taken off from the capital that morning and were on their way with an important message, he wouldn't have made the plunge.

It was a perilous swim. Not because Stupe wasn't good for two miles. He was good for four times that distance on a calm sea. It was perilous because this morning's visibility at sea level was about eighteen yards.

"I should have a fog-horn," he said aloud. The fog was so dense that he felt as if he were speaking in a small room—yet there was no telling how far his voice might carry or who might be within hearing.

Would the wingmen swim close to the water's surface on foggy mornings? He kept a sharp lookout for trouble.

The little three-foot raft which he towed was riding smoothly. It was drawn by a line attached to his belt. He had built it with a tripod of three-foot poles upon which he was able to hang his clothes (with the exception of his trunks and belt) and such portable equipment as his ax, his binoculars, and his pistol.

Abruptly he ceased talking aloud. He had a distinct feeling that someone had heard him.

The goods must be watched closely, he thought. He took up to little slack

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in the tow-line, and kept turning to make sure it was following safely.

He swam on silently. When would the shore come in sight? Had he turned in his course? There, wasn't that the bank ahead—that large white stone?

It was shaped like a horse. A bundle of mist in the shape of a horse—with a rider—a girl—

No, he was only seeing things. For it was gone and there was only the fog. There was no shore at all, only the smooth gray water.

There was the white mist again—now in another direction. The shore must be *that* way.

Stupe swam with a swifter stroke. There *must* be land just ahead. That dim gray outline—could it be that which Stupe had dreamed feverishly of seeing—a horse and rider in the sea?

Again they were gone. A sort of luminous glow hung in the fog where Stupe had thought he had seen them. Luminous *like the dream dust* he had found on his pencils.

Where now? The apparition had come and gone twice, each time too dim in detail for Stupe to be certain it wasn't a figment of his imaginings. His heart was thumping wildly. *Could it be?*

He paused, treading water, and the little raft drifted up to touch his elbow. He took the binoculars and tried to penetrate the gray mist. His efforts were useless. The flashlight might do better.

He shined the beam into the grayness, turning it slowly like a beacon. At the same time he called.

"Hello-o-o-o!"

He listened. He called three times. Then listening, he was startled to hear something strangely familiar. It was not a response to his call—far from it. It was the low drone of an airplane sailing over, high above the fog.

"Hefty!" he thought. "He's come to look for me. And here I am, somewhere in the sea—lost."

CHAPTER XIV

HEFTY WINKLE was not the worrying type. His good fists were so dependable that he rarely felt incompetent. But on the previous afternoon he had sensed that there were too many invisible troubles in the air. The sort that he did not know how to combat.

"We're missin' out on something," he had said to Velma Stevens. "Does anyone know what caused all that ruckus the other night?"

"I'm no mind reader," Velma said. "Why don't you ask the captain?"

"By George, I will. My pal Stupe is out there on his own, trustin' that we are back of him. It's my business to find out what goes on."

"If you learn anything, tell me."

Hefty would have stormed the fortress of the captain if an attendant had not dissuaded him. The captain was said to be in a serious condition. No visitors were allowed.

Hefty's next move was to call upon the ambassador. He waited in the outer office for an hour and was at last admitted. He was not used to conferring with the dignitaries and he shuffled awkwardly before the ambassador's desk.

"I just got a few questions maybe you can answer."

Ambassador Jewell, for all his austerity, seemed to welcome the conference.

"I have a few questions for you, too, Mr. Winkle. Would you like to take a walk with me across the spaceport?"

Hefty took long strides trying to keep pace with the tall ambassador. This was an event in his life. Here he was

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hobnobbing with the most important man in Venus. Stupe should see him now.

The ambassador talked casually at first. He spoke of the future developments of this land. This spaceport would accommodate a huge volume of traffic in the future years. The great financiers of America were sure to watch this planet with interest.

"Gee!" All this important talk made Hefty feel like a potential millionaire. Then the ambassador came to the point.

"I want to ask you, Mr. Winkle, what you know about the purpose of this expedition. Not Stupe Smith's purpose, but the Captain's."

They walked in silence a moment before Hefty could comprehend this question. Then—

"You mean that Stupe and the captain aren't here for the same reason?"

"That's what I am wondering."

THEIR path took them past the warehouses and hangars. As usual, the scene was humming with activity. A few official planes were being serviced. The Wellington spaceship stood near the farthest hangar and the Fiddle brothers were at work loading the two Venus planes nearby. Owing to the presence of Thelma Stevens they were dawdling at their work.

Another member of the Wellington party, Dick Bracket, leaned against the corner of the hangar observing the workers with an air of detachment.

"Hello, Mr. Bracket," the ambassador greeted him in passing.

The young man returned a saccharin smile. "How do you do, Mr. Ambassador."

Hefty saw that the ambassador didn't intend to stop and talk. The Fiddle brothers, one of the mechanics, and Thelma all turned as if expecting this to be an official visit. When the ambassador merely greeted them and continued on his way, were they disappointed, Hefty wondered, or relieved?

Jake Fiddle, his eyes glinting mischievously, called out, "Say, Mr. Ambassador didja ever git those three devilish wingmen that did the shooting?"

The ambassador stopped and turned and Hefty followed him as he sauntered toward them.

"It is not easy to apprehend mischief makers when they have wings, Mr. Fiddle," he said politely. "But I shall know their faces if I see them again. Would you?"

They looked at each other, each waiting for the other to reply. Thelma said, "My sister Selma says she would know them."

"Good. How is she feeling, by the way?"

Hefty decided that the ambassador was being as friendly as an important man could possibly be. But suspicious eyes were watching him counteracting his efforts to be congenial. Then he threw out a sharp challenge.

"We haven't found the wingmen but we discovered their guns. American made pistols. A recent patent—"

Bull Fiddle broke in with, "You don't say, Mr. Ambassador. Some of your folks must be in cahoots with 'em."

"We keep a careful record of all the firearms in this colony. Have you checked your own supply?"

THE Fiddle brothers looked at each other and Jake shrugged. No answer. The ambassador's nerves were tense, Hefty knew, as he studied one after another of them, turning at last to stare at Dick Bracket. Dick was still smiling.

"It will be necessary," said the ambassador coldly, "for me to send a

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squad of guards to check every item of your equipment against the captain's inventory."

Then the ambasador and Hefty resumed their walk. The chills were playing through Hefty's spine. It was great stuff to be seen hobnobbing with the ambassador, all right—or was it? Mentally he was doubling his fists, knowing that sooner or later he would pay for this moment with a few left hooks to someone's jaw. The ambassador was speaking to him again.

"You've known Stupe Smith a long time, haven't you?"

"I been his sidekick for the last half dozen years."

"You think a lot of him?"

"Greatest guy in the world."

"What about Captain Meetz? Have he and Smith been friends long?'

Hefty shook his head. "They just got acquainted when we took off for Venus."

After a little silence the conversation drifted in other directions and all the while Hefty did his best to keep pace with the long legged ambassador. When they parted at the entrance of the hotel, the ambassador offered his hand.

"Keep an ear to the ground, Mr. Winkle. I am going to trust you to bring me any important news you hear. You'll do that, won't you Mr. Winkle?"

The handshake was solid. "Just call me Hefty."

CHAPTER XV

SO YOU tink you keep der ear to der ground?" said Gypsy Brown to Hefty that night as they sat at a card table in one corner of the lobby. "Ledt me tell you, dot's exactly vot I been doing. Me, I got two ears to der ground, dot's vy my head iss in such a pain."

They had forgotten the card game before the first hands were dealt. Hefty simply had to talk with someone he could trust, and Gypsy Brown was the one who could understand.

"You know vot I tink?" she said, tapping him on the back of the hand, "I tink effryvun in der whole lot has come here mit a different idea. You take der doctor."

"Jabetta? What about him?" Hefty said.

All der time he writes der notes. You vatch and see."

"Every doctor writes notes, Gypsy. Prescriptions and records and things. They can't carry it all in their heads."

"You vatch and see," Gypsy repeated, her chain earrings clinking as she nodded her head seriously. "You vatch and see . . . And den, dot Dick Bracket."

"What about him?"

"He's not no good.'

"How do you know?"

They looked around to be sure Dick wasn't spying on them. He had a way of edging in on conversations unexpectedly. While they were discussing his arsenal experience, Velma joined them.

"The last time I saw Dick," Velma said, "was about an hour ago. Just as I was leaving Selma's room, he was coming from the captain's door. He was carrying a shoe box, and just for a joke I ran up and said, 'Let's see your new shoes,' and I lifted the lid and peeked before he stopped me. What do you suppose?"

"A pistol?" said Hefty.

"Shoes?" said Gypsy.

"You're both wrong. Maps. Or some kind of charts. I couldn't tell, for sure."

"He and der captain are thick like glue," said Gypsy. "Vare you tink you're goin, Hefty? Der game aindt efen begun."

"No game tonight," said Hefty, put-

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ting on his coat. "It's high time for me to put the other ear to the ground."

He strode away abruptly, and Gypsy looked after him, saying, "Now vot iss biting him?"

In the deep shadows on the farther side of the Wellington spaceship one of the planes taxied to a stop and idled gently. Thelma was at the controls. She looked down into the darkness, trying to make out the forms of Dick Bracket and the Fiddle brothers. They were still carrying on their conference with the spaceport guards. She had just returned from a ten minute warm-up flight over the capital. The plane was loaded with provisions for establishing a camp. But as yet, Thelma believed, no flight had been authorized.

"If they think they're going to trick me into an unauthorized flight, they're mistaken," she said to herself.

Jake Fiddle came into the plane, tense with excitement.

"All set for flight, Babe? We're gonna pull a fast take-off in about a minute."

"*Are* we?" Thelma said skeptically. What's the score?"

"They're stalling us. The ambassador has given them an order to look over our goods."

"Well," said Thelma. "Why not? Have we got anything to hide?"

"Dick Bracket thinks it's none of their business. The captain has given him the green light, he says."

THELMA frowned. She reached to switch off the motors, but Jake caught her hand.

"Now, Babe, just because you don't like Dick Bracket, are you gonna be nasty? I'll be goin' with you on this jaunt—Bull and I. We'll hit the Southeast Ocean beach by dawn, and unload our goods, and you and Dick can be back by early afternoon . . . How about it?"

"I'll phone the ambassador," said Thelma, reaching for the radiotelephone. "If he tells me it's okay—"

"Don't be that way, Babe." Jake caught her arm, tightened his grip on her hand and tried to draw her into an embrace.

The door swung open at that moment, and two uniformed guards entered the plane. Thelma turned to stare at them, and she was infuriated at their intrusion.

"What are you busting in here for? What business have you got—"

The guards tried to protest that orders were orders. This was their job. The ambassador had given them papers—

Dick Bracket and Bull Fiddle followed them in and Dick flashed a pistol.

"Get out!" Dick snapped. "Get out quick. We're taking off now and we don't need any surplus baggage."

The guards were taken by surprise. This smooth tongued boy had been trying to outtalk them for the past ten minutes, but he had been polite enough about it. Now they saw in his eyes the fanatical light of a man who would shoot first and ask questions afterward.

They moved toward the door. At first Thelma thought that they were going to knuckle down and take orders like a pair of slaves. But suddenly both of them whirled, reaching for their guns.

Thelma stifled a scream. It all happened in a split second. Two quick flashes. Dick's automatic pistol was almost silent. Just—*pnk-pnk!*—and the two guards sagged and fell. One of them groaned, clutching at his belly. The other simply sank, and his elbow bumped the floor and his hand stuck up limply like a fan over his face.

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"Let me out of here," Thelma said under her breath. The Fiddle brothers were staring at the fallen guards, and Jake didn't notice her as she brushed past him. But Dick Bracket blocked her path. His blazing black eyes reminded her of pictures of the devil. The devil in his youth; she thought, getting his first taste of violence. Or was this his first?

WITHOUT a word, with only a slight flourish of the pistol, he stopped her.

The Fiddle brothers began to grumble. This was no good. This would cook their goose. Dick would never get by with this kind of doings.

"We're all in this," Dick said coldly. "Drag them back in the aisle. Here, get some newspapers under them."

The Fiddle brothers obeyed like a pair of trained seals.

"Now, Miss Stevens, back to the controls, if you please.

Thelma was chilled to the fingertips. No use trying to defy this young desperado. He would commit murder at the drop of a hat. She backed away slowly, watching him.

"We won't get away with this, Dick," she said. The word *we* was her strategy. Her wits were whirling. "Dick, didn't you know—" she pointed to the window.

"What are you talking about?"

"There's someone out there. They saw you do it. They saw the whole thing. They couldn't hear what we were saying. They'll pin you for this—"

"*Who* was out there?"

"I couldn't tell." It was working, she thought. He was going to fall for it. "All I could see was a shadowy form. Look, Dick, you'd better do your stuff before he gets away."

Dick's sharp black eyes flashed toward the window. She talked fast now, and the Fiddle brothers were lapping it up. They had been too stunned to think.

"We can get by with this, Dick. We can dump these two guards on top of a mountain. The wingmen will get the blame. Everybody's looking for wingmen attacks after what happened the other night. But we'll get by—*if you snag that witness before he gets away.* Quick, pal—"

"All right, throw a light," Dick said. "You, Jake—" The burly fellow moved to the door, making ready with a pistol. Thelma seated herself at the controls and began flashing the spotlight around. Dick, at her elbow, was disconcerted. Bull Fiddle had followed his brother out. If they were on their wits, this was their chance, Thelma thought. They would race off and report. They would save their hides on this deal. But Dick must have foreseen the danger of losing them.

"Keep the spotlight on them," he said. "Back and forth from them . . . Now, sweep around that way. There's where he'd be hiding — oh-oh — there he is!"

There someone *was*—an eavesdropper, lurking at the farther edge of a baggage cart. Thelma's heart almost stopped. It had been farthest from her thoughts that there would *be* someone—

"Keep the light on him," Dick ordered. "That's good. They're on him now. A little guy in a brown coat and no hat—why, it's Hefty Winkle. Him. So. We'll take care of him, all right."

Thelma thought she would faint. There he was, little Hefty with his comical face. His eyes were batting against the spotlight. Those two big lugs had him, all right. He wasn't putting up much of a scrap, and he didn't look half as scared as Thelma

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thought he should look. Did he know there were a couple of murdered guards aboard?

"All right, Hefty, you're our prisoner," Dick Bracket snapped. "Get aboard. We're taking off on a secret mission, and we need your company. All set, Miss Stevens?"

"All set," said Thelma weakly. The motors accelerated, the plane shot swiftly across the open field and took off into the night.

CHAPTER XVI

STUPE looked up through the fog as he swam. It was hard to tell how high overhead the plane was flying. The roar of the motors was already diminishing, rolling away softly into the distance.

"This would be a fine morning for a crash," he thought. There was no use for him to give way to the panic that wanted to grip him. For the present, there was only one thing for him to do. He must get back to land as quick as possible. He must ascend to a lookout point. Perhaps he could get a fire started. Then if the fog cleared, so that they could land, there was just a chance—

"Slim chance!" he muttered pessimistically, remembering that he had been hiking for the past two days. If he had only brought a little two-way radio—

If there was only some way of getting back, or signaling—

A thousand ifs flooded his mind. But one hope was paramount — that the plane would find a safe landing in spite of this fog.

These realities came upon him so swiftly that his previous fantasies were swept away. Had he actually seen a figure of a rider in the mists? Or had that object been no more than a phantom, a thing of his imagination?

He could see the trail of waves in the still waters for a little distance back of him, and as he drew the small raft around, he believed he was returning to the shore from which he had come.

The night's flight from the spaceport across the narrow continent to the Southeast ocean had been a difficult one. For Hefty Winkle, it was like the feeling he used to have just before he went into the ring with a prize fighter twice his size. Only worse. The tension had continued all night.

Dick Bracket had blundered. Everyone on board knew that. But he seemed to know what he was doing and he insisted that the captain's authority was back of him.

"I want to talk with those Fiddle brothers in private," he had said, soon after they had passed over the Venusian capital. However, during this private conference he had made it impossible for Hefty to talk with Thelma.

"If I could only radio back to the ambassador before we get out of range," Hefty had thought. "There will be the devil to pay trying to square things." And to think the ambassador had taken him into confidence!

THE Fiddle brothers were coming to some decision, nodding their heads in agreement with Dick. Then Hefty overheard one of them say, "You're sure that the captain planned it this way? Don't we get contracts or somethin'?"

Dick drew some papers from his pocket. Jake and Bull studied them with blank expressions and handed them back.

"We'd better get rid of these corpses," said Jake.

As they flew over the Divide, they unceremoniously pushed the bodies out

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the door. That was that. Hefty watched Dick as he wiped his hands on his handkerchief.

"I'll have a few words with you and Miss Stevens," Dick said.

During their conference, which lasted the rest of the night, Hefty did his best to gauge Thelma's reactions. It wasn't easy to figure out a girl like that. She and her sister had been born with poker faces, he decided.

At first Hefty had believed her to be in cahoots with Dick. That spotlight had been his own undoing. And yet her manner didn't betray any respect for Dick Bracket's plans.

"Here is the proposition," Dick said. "You can take it or leave it. I'll give it to you straight from the shoulder just as Captain Meetz told it to me."

He unfolded a map of the continent. Hefty recognized the outline of the Southeast ocean with the fingers of land extending into it and the profile of a man's shoulder and head farther to the east. Unlike any map Hefty had seen before, this one was marked with products—minerals, forests, oil lands and other natural resources.

"The Wellington expedition has come," Dick explained with an air of ownership, "to establish a chain of outposts. Within a few years this land will be the Wellington empire."

Thelma spoke up rapidly. "What makes Wellington think he can get away with anything like that?"

"Wellington is willing to take a few risks." The young desperado smiled suavely. "He has hand-picked his key men. We don't mind running a few risks."

Hefty was looking dizzily through the map, through the fore of the plane, through the planet itself, as he tried to tie this explanation to the personality of Wellington. What about the entertainments for millionaires? What about the beautiful girl on the white horse?

"I don't get it," Hefty said. "Stupe has been sent here for the express purpose of finding the girl that Mr. Vest talked about—"

"Bunkum!"

"Huh?"

"Get wise, Sonny Boy. That talk was just a screen." Dick gave Hefty a patronizing pat on the head. "There was no such thing as a beautiful girl riding through the sea."

Hefty angered.

"But Stupe heard Mr. Vest say—"

"Yes, Vest evidently believed it. It was a convenience to Wellington that a nut like Vest happened along. Very convenient indeed."

HEFTY'S nerves were suddenly tight with ill-repressed fury. "But it can't be just a gag. Wellington offered Stupe a cool million."

Dick laughed lightly. "A provisional offer. *If* he finds the girl. But he won't. I heard Wellington laughing about that afterward. 'They call him Stupe Smith,' Wellington told us. 'Stupe for Stupendous. When he gets back from this little clambake it will be Stupe for Stupid.' Now, Hefty," Dick Bracket was smiling like a salesman who was about to sign up a stubborn customer, "when the Wellington empire is established there will be huge profits for those who get in on the ground floor. Would you like to see a copy of the agreement?"

Before Hefty could reply, Thelma said, "All right, all right, you and all your big shot friends are going to dish out a round of fortunes on a silver platter. Is that the idea?"

"If you see fit to cooperate in every detail," said Dick, tossing his head back and narrowing his eyes at her.

"I never decide about matters like this without talking to my sisters," said

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Thelma, "but I'll admit it looks good. Why don't you get smart and rope the ambassador in on the same deal?"

Dick evaded this question. It was evident that the personal flare-up between him and Ambassador Jewell would not be easily forgotten.

"Wellington has picked his beneficiaries with care. You and your sisters are among the lucky ones. How about you, Brother Winkle?"

Hefty was still looking at the map. "It looks like a good country. But you're not going to get away with these high-handed methods. Shooting guards on sight is not the way to do business, my friend."

Dick's very pleasant smile accompanied his sarcastic tone. "So you know how this deal should be operated? We'll see. I'll take care of my end. Your part will be to handle your friend Stupe."

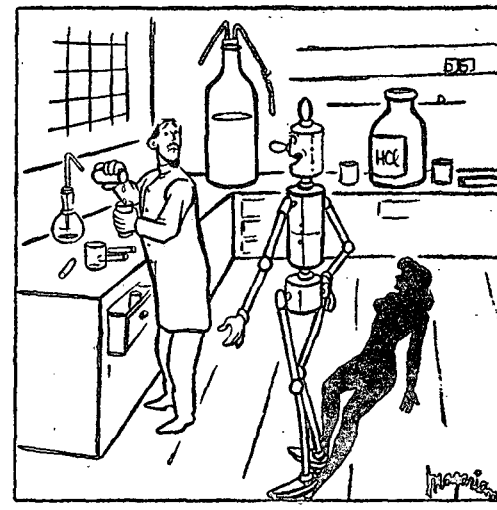
"In what way?"

"Study this map," said Dick. "If you influence your friend to see any advantages for himself here, then we'll be able to do business."

For the first time Hefty began to see Dick Bracket in a new light. Perhaps all of this rash action was something more than boyish impulsiveness after all. At first it had seemed that a return to the Venusian capital would be impossible for Dick, after those two cold-blooded murders. But now Hefty wondered. Could the captain work fast enough to fix things?

Hefty looked into the black sky and wished for morning. It had been a dismal night ever since they crossed the Divide. If only a star would show—if only that certain planet called the Earth would peek through the clouds—

How was Stupe spending this night, he wondered. His memory drifted back to that long trek in the Andes when he and Stupe had risked their lives in an attempted rescue. In the end, the lost party had found its way out before he and Stupe arrived.



"But how do you know I'm a girl?"

"History repeats itself," Hefty thought. Again Stupe was tramping over an uncharted wilderness looking for someone who wasn't there.

Now in the rear of the cabin the bottles and glasses were clinking. The Fiddle brothers and their young leader were drinking to the new Wellington empire. An ugly trio, those three men. Two brothers, brawny fellows with hard faces and gangster manners. One boy of twenty or so, sharp featured, alert, a clever talker.

They offered Thelma a drink. She refused. She was lost in her own thoughts. The illuminated dials reflected a green light in her eyes.

Dawn came with a sky of solid gray.

"Fog," Thelma said. She turned to Hefty and for the first time he saw something in her expression, however cynical, that give him hope. It was a faint hint that privately she might resent this ugly business as much as he.

"Fog," she repeated. "That's all we need."

(Continued on page 90)

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I'LL DREAM OF YOU

By Charles F. Myers

Toffee was just a girl in Marc Pillsworth's dreams—until he awoke one day to find the dream a reality

TOFFEE leaned back against the tree and passed a slender hand through her red hair. As her arm relaxed, she let it fall carelessly about Marc's neck. Lazily, her green eyes traced his profile and found it, if not classic, highly satisfactory.

"Kiss me," she said.

"Oh, for Pete's sake," murmured Marc, continuing to stare straight ahead.

Toffee followed his gaze to the scene before them. The entire countryside, apparently unaware of its inherent stateliness, was caught in a sort of informal gaity.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Toffee asked.

"Yes," replied Marc dreamily.

"You seem fascinated by beauty, almost starved for it."

Marc nodded and leaned his head back further on the tree.

"Then get fascinated, you dope," Toffee leaned forward to face him.

"Huh?" Marc stared at the girl as though he hadn't been quite aware of her before.

"I'm beautiful too and twice as much fun." It was a simple statement of fact. "Kiss me," she added.

"Haven't you any restraint?"

"With everything else I have, you ask for restraint!" Toffee drew nearer.

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Jack danced on, completely at ease while around him people started to edge away with startled glances . . .

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"You're shameless," said Marc.

"Naturally." Toffee closed her eyes and advanced her lips to his. Abruptly, Marc threw his hands to the grass before him and boosted himself to his feet, leaving Toffee's arm to fall dejectedly to her side.

"Maybe next time," she murmured, shrugging her shoulders. "Even the glacial age had to come to an end eventually."

MARC caught hold of a limb just over his head and swung effortlessly to a branch above Toffee, where he settled himself comfortably and continued his studied contemplation of the landscape. Toffee reached a hand toward him and waited.

"Well, don't just sit there like a stone image," she called. "Give me a hand. I want up too."

Slowly, Marc looked down at her and studied the pert, upturned face with solemn gravity. Suddenly, he shook his head and returned to his attitude of sombre speculation. Toffee seemed not at all daunted.

"I'll show you," she yelled. "I'll shake you out of there like a cocoanut." With that, she took hold of the tree and began to tug at it vehemently until, slowly it began to sway. As though she had pulled a bell chord, a soft, distinct tolling began to make itself heard, and as the tree swayed more violently, the sound became louder. Soon the motion of the tree became so great that Marc found himself clutching the branch to keep his balance.

"For the love of Mike, Toffee!" he yelled through the uproar of the bell. "Stop it! Do you want me to break my neck?"

"But I'm not doing it!" hollered Toffee. It seemed that the tree had become possessed of a will of its own as it rocked back and forth in a constantly increasing arc. Toffee stood back from it in terror. As it made a new, deeper lunge, Marc lost his seat but continued to cling to the branch with his hands. At the end of the arc, the tree seemed to pause in anticipation of a final gigantic thrust. As it did so, the clap of the bell was almost intolerable. Suddenly, Marc felt himself lifted and hurled swiftly into space. He seemed to be flying upward and away from the earth, as though the force of gravity had utterly forsaken him.

As he sailed along, he looked back over his shoulder to behold a scene that was especially disconcerting. All the earth below him seemed to be caught in the swaying motion of the tree. It rocked crazily in a see-saw motion, constantly accompanied by the tolling of the great, ghostly bell. Then, suddenly, the action stopped. The earth shuddered and seemed to crumble, falling into space. Through the ensuing quiet, Marc could only wonder at what had happened; then, faintly, through the sound of rushing air, he began to hear his name being called. He turned his head quickly to see Toffee rushing through space after him.

"Wait Marc, Wait!" she cried.

He reached a hand out, toward her.

MARC'S hand fell heavily to the alarm clock on the bedside table and the noise ceased. The fact that he was awake didn't mean that he was rested. He rolled over in the bed without opening his eyes, and began carefully to review the dream, for it had left him strangely uneasy. The thing that disturbed him most was the girl, Toffee. As he thought of her, she became more and more vivid, more and more insistent as a real personality. It was strange how real she did seem, especially since she had been so unlike any girl that Marc had ever known. It

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wasn't that he wouldn't have liked to have known a girl like that, it was just that he had been so occupied with the development of the Pillsworth Advertising Agency that he rarely had time for girls like, or unlike, Toffee. The dream had brought to him a vague suspicion that perhaps something was missing in his life, something like Toffee for instance. There was Julie Mason of course, Marc's secretary, but although she was an even match for any model that had ever been in the office, Julie was still a very efficient business woman, and for some reason that cancelled irrevocably any idea of romance. He sat up in bed and stretched his arms up, over his head, yawning luxuriously. Suddenly, he became transfixed, his arms rigid above him and his mouth wide open. He stared in fascination at the foot of the bed.

Toffee turned and smiled wickedly.

"I almost didn't make it," she said. "Thanks for the lift."

Marc's lips worked feverishly but produced nothing intelligible.

"Well, don't just sit there making faces, tell me how glad you are to see me—and put your arms down."

Slowly and mechanically, Marc lowered his arms.

"Now," Toffee continued. "Let's not waste time—kiss me." She raised herself from the edge of the bed and moved toward him.

Instantly, Marc became animated, leaping from the bed like a flushed bird. He rushed to the window and seemed about to jump, when, suddenly, he halted. Slowly, he turned and faced her.

"I've gone mad," he muttered. "I'm nuts!"

Toffee remained by the bed in a state of acute bewilderment. This wasn't precisely the reaction that she had expected.

"We're not going through all that again?" Her voice expressed utter disappointment.

"Get out!" yelled Marc. "Get out of here you—you—you figment!"

"But Marc, don't you know me? I'm Toffee, your dream girl."

"Go get yourself into a dream then," yelled Marc. "I'm awake."

"Oh, I see what's troubling you." A bright smile lighted Toffee's face. "Now, just come over here and sit down while I explain everything." She extended a hand to him and, fascinated, Marc moved toward her and sat down gingerly on the edge of the bed.

"THAT'S nice," cooed Toffee. "Now just stop being so jumpy and I'll tell you all about it. In the first place, you dreamed me up. All I am I owe to you and, judging by the mirror, I'd say that was plenty. Up until now, I've existed only in your subconscious, but last night, while you were dreaming, you released me, gave me physical dimensions and a personality. Now, that works both ways; it was the first chance I'd had to see you too. Well, it seemed that you were a nice enough guy, but a little mixed up about a lot of important things, so I decided to materialize myself and help you out. And let me tell you, that materializing stuff is no easy proposition."

Marc's eyes filled with wonder.

"You mean to tell me you're really here—in the flesh, I mean?"

Toffee slowly crossed one lovely leg over the other. "What do you think?" she asked.

"Well, you'll have to go back," Marc yelled, jumping up. "Its very nice of you to want to help out and all, but I can take care of things for myself. Thank you very much. Now, goodbye." He stood back from her as though expecting an explosion, but nothing hap-

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pened.

"Well, you heard me. Goodbye—fade—dematerialize—do your stuff!" Toffee smiled mysteriously and shook her head.

"Sorry boss, I can't do it. The only way for me to disappear is for you to go to sleep, then I have to return, but when you wake up, I'll be right back. Once you get it started, it works automatically. Of course there is one way to get rid of me for good but we won't go into that, not just yet anyway. And while we're on the subject, I may as well tell you—I'm pretty sick of that subconscious of yours. A girl could certainly ask for better company. I've never seen so many stuffy ideas. All that will be changed of course."

Marc shuddered as Toffee sat back with a satisfied smile.

"You're completely unprincipled," he groaned.

"You'd better not start criticizing. Like the man says, you made me what I am today and you'd bloody well better be satisfied." Toffee was interrupted by a timid knock on the door.

"Good grief!" cried Marc. "That's Joseph. Do something!"

Toffee knew exactly what to do. She ran quickly to the mirror, and after several pats at her hair, turned, in a seductive pose to face the door. It was then that Marc noticed her costume, a light, transparent affair that seemed but half inclined to stay in place. The tableau that she presented was effective, but extremely alarming under the circumstances.

"What do you think you're doing," hissed Marc.

"I like to look my best when gentlemen are calling," giggled Toffee.

Frantically, Marc rushed and grabbed a sheet, then rushed to Toffee with some idea of concealing her. Of course Toffee was of no mind to have her obvious charms hidden, and a wild struggled ensued.

SLOWLY, the door open and an aged head appeared in the opening. Large watery eyes fell on the disturbing scene and became even larger. Instantly, the head disappeared and the door slammed to.

"There, now see what you've done," yelled Marc.

Toffee threw the sheet disdainfully aside.

"And what do you expect a lady to do when she's attacked?"

"Attacked!" Marc screamed indignantly.

"Just because another man comes into the room is no reason for you to go showing off like a juvenile delinquent."

Marc snorted with helpless rage. "I was trying to cover you up!"

"Oh—," murmured Toffee with obvious disappointment.

"Joseph is one of the best valets in the business, but also one of the most moral," explained Marc. "I've had to be a regular saint to keep him, and now *you*—! He'll quit me like a flash."

"You'll be better off without him," said Toffee with conviction. "You see! I'm beginning to help you already."

Marc tossed a dressing gown to Toffee with instructions to put it on and wait for him in the sitting room. He dressed quickly and joined her there with deep misgivings as Toffee looked up brightly from the divan.

"This is a pretty swank apartment, Marc. You must be rich."

"Never mind that, we've got to do something about you," he said, seating himself beside her.

"I'm just loaded with suggestions," said Toffee archly.

"You're just loaded," growled Marc. "You can't stay here and I can't turn you loose in that get-up." He indi-

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cate her brief costume.

"You could buy me some clothes," suggested Toffee.

Silently, Joseph shuffled into the room, halted just behind them and fixed his eyes firmly on the ceiling. He cleared his throat with a bark that would have done *Lassie* all kinds of credit. Marc started from his seat as though he had been kicked.

"Breakfast," announced Joseph in a voice that made it sound like a direct accusation.

AS THE elevator door closed behind Marc and Toffee, a low whistle issued from the cage. The operator had let them out in the basement, whether from confusion or discretion, Marc couldn't be sure, but decided that perhaps it was all for the best. By keeping Toffee low and behind him, they managed to get to the car in the downstairs garage without attracting too much attention.

Once, out in the street, Marc felt better but the ordeal to come had him worried. Toffee had insisted on selecting the clothes in person.

"Now get what you need," instructed Marc, "but get it in a hurry. And above all, get something to put on just as soon as we get inside."

Toffee nodded excitedly.

By repeating the crouch and run routine, they managed to get into the store safely, and luckily it was still early enough that only a few customers were about. Marc quickly hid Toffee behind a clothes rack and went in search of an understanding saleslady. He spotted a neon marker at the other side of the store that said: "Ladies' Ready-to-Wear," and made his way in that direction. As he entered the department a tousled, gray head jutted from behind a plaster figure and Marc started back in alarm. Two beady, black eyes rolled crazily and the teeth were bared, clenching an amazing number of straight pins. Slowly a gnarled hand appeared beneath the chin and the mouth spewed the pins into it and broke into a horrible grimace that was apparently meant to be a smile.

"I'm Miss Clatt." The small, piping voice sounded somewhat lost in the horrible head. "May I help you?" Slowly the head moved from behind the figure, dragging with it a small, well padded body, perched precariously atop a pair of delicate pipe-stem legs.

"I need an outfit," stammered Marc. "A complete outfit."

"Oh," replied Miss Clatt disappointedly. "You'll find Men's Furnishings on the third floor—just take the elevator."

"You don't understand," said Marc hurriedly. "It's a lady's outfit I want."

Miss Clatt looked disapproving. "You'll find a theatrical costumer in the next block."

"No, no, I want it for a lady. She's with me, waiting up front there." Marc gestured toward the main entrance. I'd appreciate it if you'd hurry. She hasn't any clothes."

Miss Clatt's hand went to her throat and her eyes began to roll again.

"Naked?" she whispered.

"No, of course not," replied Marc with dignity. "She's wearing a robe."

"Oh," said Miss Clatt as if that explained everything, then on second thought added: "Oh, dear!"

SWIFTLY they moved across the store with Marc in the lead and Miss Clatt hopping along behind him. Marc stopped before the clothing rack and parted the coats hanging on it, only to be greeted by the blank wall.

"I left her right here," he said turning to Miss Clatt in bewilderment. But the old lady wasn't listening.

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"Gracious," she said. Her eyes had begun to rotate again and she was staring toward the sidewalk. Marc followed her gaze and saw what appeared to be a small riot before the store. Leaving the bewildered Miss Clatt by the rack, he raced for the door and forced his way into the crowd.

"It's just shameful what these stores will do for publicity," said a lady's voice. "Just shameful!"

"Stop crowdin', Bud," said a little man as Marc shoved past him. "I want to see too. Ain't seen anything like this since I got married."

Marc stretched to his toes and peered into the window. It was even worse than he had expected. There in the show case was Toffee. She had managed to get a black evening gown off one of the mannikins and was trying to put it on without removing the robe. This operation led to a series of maneuvers that would have sent any professional stripper into paroxysms of envy. Occasionally she paused in her questionable activities to smile at the crowd about the window and acknowledge the resultant cheers of encouragement. Marc wheeled about and fought his way wildly back into the store.

"Heavens," gasped Miss Clatt as he raced past, almost knocking her down. "What a strange young man—so impetuous!"

Frantically Marc clawed at the show case door and finally got it open.

"Stop that!" he yelled as he jumped into the case.

"But you told me to get something to wear right away," cried Toffee.

At Marc's appearance in the window, the crowd became momentarily silent, awaiting developments. Marc ran to Toffee and, getting between her and her audience, tried to disengage the black dress.

"Stop that," yelled Toffee. "I've almost got it on." But her words were lost in an angry roar from the crowd.

"Just like my husband," murmured a matronly lady. "Never wants me to have a thing to wear. Look at that poor child—almost naked."

A salesgirl from the five and ten paused on her way to work.

"Just like my Oscar," she remarked bitterly, as she peered into the window. "No sense of the time and place."

INSIDE the window, a state of chaos had swiftly been reached. In their struggle, Toffee and Marc had managed to knock down several dummies and get themselves hopelessly entangled in the mess. The scene was now made up entirely of a horrible, wild mass of frantic arms and legs. Suddenly the mob became silent once more at the rather dismaying appearance of Miss Clatt in the window. She stopped short and surveyed the terrifying display with eyes that revolved like pin-wheels. Hastily, she gained the front of the window by a series of quick, side-stepping hops and pulled down the huge shade, shutting off the window from the street. Instantly a loud roar of disappointment was heard from the crowd.

"My, my," murmured Miss Clatt, as she reached into the heap of arms and legs in an attempt to disentangle the frantic couple.

Toffee was the first to emerge. Miraculously, she had somehow managed, during the struggle, to get into the evening gown. She smiled at Miss Clatt.

"I can't stand men who make scenes, can you?" she asked haughtily.

"*I* make scenes!" yelled Marc, casting a dummy aside.

"You heard me," said Toffee icily as she stalked from the window with an air of outraged dignity.

Marc stood, for a moment, glaring after her. Finally, noticing that Miss

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Clatt was plucking at his sleeve, he helped her from the case and followed. When they reached the "Ladies' Ready-to-Wear" department, they found Toffee posing before a full length mirror. She turned to Marc and smiled ecstatically. She looked radiant.

"I could almost forgive you," she cooed.

Marc couldn't say anything. He just glowered.

FOR fifteen years, Marc Pillsworth hadn't been late for work for a single day, so it was no wonder that his appearance at noon caused considerable excited speculation throughout the agency. The fact that he was accompanied by an extremely racy looking red-head in a black evening gown, lent real shock value to the occasion. To make matters worse, Marc managed to announce his humiliation to the entire staff by rushing through the outer office like a reluctant criminal being taken into custody before a battery of newsreel cameras. Toffee, however, aware that she was cutting quite a figure, (most of which was startlingly apparent), was like a flower girl at a wedding. She had warm smiles for everyone, especially the men.

Swiftly, Marc gained the door to his private office and disappeared inside, but Toffee, upon reaching it, caught in the gala atmosphere of the occasion, turned to face the astonished group.

"You wonderful people—," she began. What message she had for the employees of the Pillsworth Agency was to remain forever a mystery, for suddenly, she lurched backwards into the office and the door slammed to.

"What do you think you're doing!" yelled Marc.

"Let go of me," said Toffee indignantly. "I was only making friends."

Marc sighed deeply. "And why on earth did you have to wear *that?* Heaven only knows what they're thinking out there."

"I know," replied Toffee simply.

Marc turned from her in the resignation of despair, and suddenly stopped short. Facing him, mouth agape, was Julie Mason.

"Good morning, Julie," he stammered.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Pillsworth," said Julie absently. Her gaze followed Toffee as she crossed to one of the large, upholstered chairs.

"Oh, yes," said Marc hurriedly. "Julie, this is Toffee, my—uh—my neice. She lost her baggage on the way out and had to wear just what she had left." He laughed nervously, hoping that the fact that Toffee had seen fit to be caught short in an evening gown, might somehow explain itself.

"How-do-you-do," said Julie icily, noting that Marc was a wretched liar.

Toffee peered from the chair to take in the cool, blond Julie.

"Marc has had some lovely thoughts about you," she said gaily. Julie turned to Marc in bewilderment, but he couldn't think of anything to say. Suddenly she pivoted and rushed from the room. The door didn't exactly slam behind her, but there was no doubt about its being closed. Marc slumped into the chair at his desk and stared forlornly after her.

For a time it was quiet in the office until Toffee rose from the chair and crossed to a mirror at the opposite side of the room. Suddenly she turned to Marc.

"Stop that day dreaming," she commanded. "You're making me fade. Marc glanced up. Toffee had suddenly turned quite pale.

"I forgot to tell you," she said earnestly. "It isn't just that I disappear when you sleep, I also fade when you

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day-dream. Please stay awake."

Marc stared at her in fascination and his expression became quite thoughtful.

A DOOR at the back of the room opened cautiously and Julie's face appeared in the opening.

"The models are here for the Sheer Hosiery ad.," she announced.

"I'll be right out, Julie." Marc swung out of the chair and toward the door. He turned back to Toffee.

"I'll be back in a moment, don't leave the office."

As Marc entered the hall, he saw Julie going into her office next door.

"Julie!" he called.

"Yes, Mr. Pillsworth?"

She turned to him, and for a moment Marc couldn't remember what he had started to say.

"Would you help me choose a model, please?" he asked finally. Julie nodded and, together, they crossed to the "Audition" room.

"Raise your skirts, please," said Julie as they entered. Quickly, the girls formed a line and did as they were told. Instantly, Marc's eye was caught by a black skirt at the end of the line, being lifted unnecessarily high. He leaped quickly and caught it just in time.

"Stop that and get out of here," he hissed.

"Not on you're life," murmured Toffee acidly. "Any time you go around looking at legs, you'll look at mine—understand?"

"Can't I make you understand that this is a business office?"

"What a business!" Toffee glanced significantly at the line of shapely legs.

"Get out of here!" Marc glanced furtively at Julie.

"I'll make you a deal," replied Toffee sweetly.

"Anything!"

"If you'll take me to the swankiest night club in town tonight, I'll leave with, or without, a struggle—however you want it."

"Yes, yes, anything," said Marc quickly. He took her by the arm and led her past the line of girls. At the door he turned back to Julie.

"Will you select one and dismiss the others?"

"Of course." Julie kept her eyes on the models.

Quickly, she chose one of the girls, gave her the address of the photographer and sent the others away. After they had gone, she crossed to the window and stared intently at the city below her. She didn't move for several minutes. Presently, she turned and left the room. Julie wasn't the kind for crying.

"ISN'T it heavenly," sighed Toffee as she surveyed the smart Spar Club. Marc's feeling was one of unmixed apprehension as he took into account the wayward gleam in her eye.

"Judging by the pagan display on the dance floor, I should say that this is about as unlike heaven as anything could be," he replied sourly.

"Well, anyway, the music is good."

Marc glanced at the orchestra, a disconsolate group of musicians, wedged uncomfortably into a bandstand that appeared more like a jeweler's showcase. These men peered malevolently from their perch and alleviated an obvious resentment for the paying guests by blasting away at them with their instruments as loudly and unrelatedly as possible. One young man, with some sort of horn, seemed to be nursing an especial grudge, for occasionally he would leave his seat, and coming to the front of the minute platform, set the thing into a squeal that was nothing short of terrifying.

Marc looked to the people at the

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tables about theirs, but none of them seemed at all disturbed by this hysterical performance. He shrugged and picked up the bottle from the ice bucket. He had never been a drinking man but he felt that it might help him to understand what was going on.

"Oh, don't we know her?" asked Toffee suddenly.

"Stop pointing—who?"

"The girl just coming in, the one with the white dress and perfectly haunting man."

Marc turned and looked in the direction Toffee had indicated.

"Why it's Julie!" he exclaimed.

"Who's that with her?"

"Jack Snell, he's an artist with the agency. I never did like him, but he's too good a layout man to lose. I wonder what Julie's doing with him."

"Ask him over," urged Toffee.

Marc raised a hand and wig-wagged in their direction. Jack Snell was a born "Gathering Appraiser," and it didn't take him long to catch the signal. As they moved across the floor toward him, Marc couldn't help noticing that Julie looked especially wonderful. This was the first time he had seen her outside of the office and her white lace dress emphasized all the glamour that her customary business suit suppressed.

"She looks like something out of a dream," he thought and then blanched. He revised the thought hurriedly: "She looks like something out of real life."

"Hello," said Jack. He addressed Marc but looked at Toffee. His face lit up like a pin ball machine. Toffee had run up a winning score.

"Oh, yes," said Marc quickly, "I want you to meet Toffee, my—uh—my cousin."

"She was your niece earlier today," Julie said evenly.

Marc laughed self-consciously as Jack and Julie seated themselves at the table. Julie turned to Toffee.

"Are you enjoying your visit here?"

"Oh, yes," replied Toffee with enthusiasm. "Everyone seems so friendly. Do you know what one man said to me today?"

"I could guess," said Julie flatly.

"I think we should dance," Jack cut in quickly.

"Oh, I'd love to," beamed Toffee.

THEY rose and started for the dance floor. Turning, Toffee said: "You'll excuse us?" She was looking directly at Julie.

"Did you want to dance," asked Marc without enthusiasm.

"No, thank you," replied Julie. "The floor is much too crowded."

"That's good, I don't know how very well."

"You never go out much, do you? That is, you haven't until lately."

"Why, no. I've been too busy—until lately. Perhaps that was a mistake."

"Perhaps," said Julie cryptically as she turned to the dance floor.

"You're looking very beautiful," said Marc.

"Am I?" Julie continued to look away but she couldn't restrain a faint smile.

Marc found himself with nothing to say, but continued to stare at Julie. He couldn't get over the change in her. His mind wandered off into a lovely, imaginary land without night clubs, in which he and Julie were the only inhabitants.

This was extremely unfortunate for, out on the dance floor, Jack Snell suddenly found himself dancing, inexplicably and most embarrassingly, alone. Toffee had suddenly vanished into thin air. He also found himself alarmingly confronted by Mrs. Claribel Housing, a matron of tremendous prominence, in more ways and places than one. Mrs.

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Housing understood any misdemeanor perpetrated in the Spray Club as a personal affront, to be dealt with personally. After all, it did cast unflattering reflections on her "Set."

"Young man," she boomed. "I wonder if you realize what a disgusting exhibition you are presenting. I should think that if you must get roaring drunk, you could do it somewhere less public."

Jack turned to her dazedly. "But I had a girl," he said unhappily. "I seem to have lost her."

A soft light came into Mrs. Housing's eyes. "He's gone mad," she shouted, turning to her partner. "He's lost his girl, and it's driven him crazy."

If there was anything that put life into Claribel Housing, it was "straightening out" someone else's life. She looked on Jack with the air of the practiced social worker.

"There, there, son," she roared. "Don't take on so about it. I'm sure she wasn't half good enough for you." She placed a beefy arm about his shoulder, and nodded to her partner. "Everett, we must do something for this pour soul."

Everett Housing had learned to accept his wife's "projects" with resigned good humor.

"Yes, dear," he sighed, and followed obediently as his wife led the hapless Jack from the dance floor. It didn't seem to concern the matron that the dancers were stopping to observe their progress.

BACK at the table, Julie noticing the excitement, reached for Marc's sleeve.

"Something's happening to Jack and Toffee!" she cried, jumping up. Marc, jolted from his reverie, followed after her. They reached the group on the dance floor just in time to witness Toffee's reappearance.

"What's going on here?" screamed Toffee, confronting Mrs. Housing.

"Please get out of my way," said Mrs. Housing regally.

"Get out of *your* way!" Toffee flared. "You should be ashamed of yourself! Picking up a girl's man when her back is turned—and on public dance floors too! And at your age!"

Mrs. Housing seemed to explode.

"How dare you! I should think that you had caused enough trouble,—you little floosey!" It was apparent to her that this was the young lady who had unseated Jack's reason. At this point Jack did, indeed, appear somewhat demented. Through the ensuing uproar, he tried valiantly but vainly to make himself heard, and seemed merely to be babbling to himself. Toffee was beside herself with rage.

"Why, you—you—you old back issue," she yelled. "You outsized pick-up!" She swung her foot behind her and calculated the distance to Mrs. Housing's shin. Unfortunately, her heel caught on the rung of Mr. Kently's chair. That good gentleman, unconcerned of the tumult raging just behind him, was, at the moment, determinedly offering a toast to his wife on the occasion of their twenty-fifth anniversary. He lifted his glass, and with the words: "And to you, my dear—," tossed its entire contents neatly into Mrs. Kently's face. Toffee had jerked the chair swiftly from under him. Mrs. Kently shot out of her chair with a scream designed for blood chilling.

Across the room, a guest, somewhat befogged by too much drink, raised a heavy head and shouted: "Murder!" at the top of his lungs. Across from him, his companion looked up with startled eyes and quietly slid under the table, unconscious. The man looked down at her without concern.

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"Can't stand the sight of blood," he explained to no one in particular.

The center of this excitement suddenly dissipated itself with the stately, if hurried, departure of Mrs. Housing and her obedient husband, but the fever of hysteria had already spread to the remaining guests and was raging unabated. The orchestra, caught in the spirit of the occasion, struck up a raucous rendition of "The Beer Barrel Polka." Several guests, similarly inspired, rapped their partners rather ungently over the head with whatever bottles were at hand. The door to the manager's office opened briefly and slammed to. Finally, Marc managed to fight his way through to Toffee.

"Now, see what you've done!" he yelled.

"So this is night clubbing," squealed Toffee delightedly.

"We have to get out of here," Marc guided her away from the dance floor.

"Just when things were really getting started?" asked Toffee. "Where are Jack and Julie?"

"They've gone and we'd better do the same."

"Just a moment," replied Toffee and disappeared into the crowd again. Marc made a grab for her but missed. Presently she returned, beaming triumphantly. Under her arm, she carried a bottle of champagne.

"I don't see why we should let it go to waste," she explained. Marc groaned and hurried her off toward the entrance.

Outside, they were greeted not only by the cool, evening air, but also by what appeared to be the entire police force. The manager of the Spar Club stood behind them.

"There they are, boys!" he yelled excitedly. "Grab 'em!"

TOFFEE was delighted to find herself, once more, the center of attention. She looked up at the judge with a disarming smile. She felt a little sorry for the poor little man—he seemed so perplexed by everything. Marc stood beside her, wondering vaguely if he weren't dead, and if not, why not. The judge fixed Toffee with a baleful stare.

"Who did you say your parents were?" His voice was that of a martyr.

"A moonlit night and a yearning spirit," said Toffee blandly. The judge's eyes rolled ceilingward.

"Oh, good Lord," he sighed in pure supplication.

"What she means—," began Marc.

"You stay out of this!" snapped the judge. "I'll hear from you later."

"But judge," said Toffee. "I don't know how I can make it clearer."

"Never mind," replied the judge hotly. "Let's hear no more about it. I sincerely wish I hadn't brought it up in the first place. Now, perhaps, you'll tell me what went on in the Spar Club this evening, and never mind the poetry."

"Well," said Toffee brightly, "it all started when this old fright tried to steal Mr. Snell from me—right there on the dance floor, too." An earnest expression crept over her face. "She should be locked up, judge."

Marc's thoughts raced wildly. If ever there was a time for Toffee to fade, this was unquestionably it. He clamped his eyes tightly shut and tried frantically to picture peaceful, pastoral scenes in an attempt to induce sleep. However, what occurred to him most frequently were bleak countrysides strewn with assorted wreckage, symbolic of his future.

"Exactly what is your relationship with this man?" The judge nodded in Marc's direction without looking at him.

"Well" said Toffee. "You see, I sort of belong to him, in a way."

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"You mean he's your guardian?" This appealed to Toffee and she nodded vigorously. The judge turned to Marc.

"Young man—," he began, then looked questioningly at Toffee. "What's the matter with him?"

Toffee turned to Marc and sudden anger flashed in her eyes.

"You double-crosser!" she hissed. Swiftly her hand shot to Marc's unsuspecting rear and two fingers closed wickedly. Instantly, Marc's eyes flew open and stared wildly at the judge as a piercing scream rent the courtroom and he leaped frantically forward. A small cry of terror was heard from the frightened judge as he disappeared beneath the bench.

"He's attacking me!" he screamed from the floor. "Get him out of here! Get them both out of here! Lock them up before they kill someone!"

As two official brutes closed in on them, Marc angrily faced Toffee.

"If you ever do anything like this again, I'll deliberately contract sleeping sickness!" he shouted.

MARC awoke wondering how long he had been asleep, and, in the grey morning light, began to inspect his quarters without enthusiasm. The cell that he occupied was like any other, but he had been lucky enough to have it all to himself. He lay, face up in the lower section of the steel, double-decker and reviewed the preceding night's activities. Suddenly, he started forward and propped himself up on one elbow. There was a form clearly outlined in the mattress above him. He tried to remember if anyone had been brought into the cell during the night. As he was thinking about it, the form stirred. Slowly, he advanced a hand to the mattress and prodded it gingerly. His suspicions were immediately confirmed.

"Good morning," called Toffee with a hateful cheerfulness as she peered down at him from the upper.

"I thought they put you in the women's quarters."

"They did, but I decided to materialize here, to be with you."

"But, if they find you here—," Marc gave it up. Things couldn't get any worse. "I hope you're happy about this." He waved his hand tragically at the cell.

"Well," said Toffee slowly. "I *can* think of better places. Let's leave."

"And how do you propose to get out of here?"

"You mean they intend to keep us here?"

"It is likely, considering your performance before the judge last night, that we shall rot in this place."

"We'll just have to get out." Toffee's brow wrinkled sternly.

Marc looked grieved but made no reply. After several moments of concentrated thought, his face lit up.

"Now, look Toffee, he said, "You say that you can materialize anywhere. Suppose I doze off for a while, do you suppose you could manage to "come to" outside and get the keys to this trap? After all, they don't have our names, our real ones, on any of the records yet."

"I could do it with my eyes closed," Toffee cried happily.

"Well, don't get fancy about it."

Marc stretched out on the bed and closed his eyes, and everything became quiet in the cell for a time. Toffee waited expectantly but nothing happened. Marc swung his legs over the edge of the bed and cupped his chin in his hands.

"It's no use," he sighed. "I've too much on my mind.

"Try again," urged Toffee.

"It's no use I tell you."

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Toffee sat up and glanced down at Marc. Slowly an intense expression crept over her face. Quietly, she reached down and removed one of her shoes, and regarded it sadly. She leaned over the edge of the bed and poised it over Marc's head. Closing her eyes, she swung the shoe downward as swiftly as she could. Marc slumped to the floor soundlessly.

MARC had been right in assuming that Joseph wouldn't be there to open the door for them. He fitted the key into the lock and turned it.

"You needn't have hit me so hard," he grumbled. Toffee looked hurt.

"I got you out of there, didn't I? Of course, maybe I shouldn't have left that note for the judge." Marc looked alarmed.

"What note?"

"Well, the poor dear was so disturbed about my parentage that I left a note explaining the whole thing. I guess it wasn't such a good idea."

"What did you tell him?"

"That my father was a Welsh." Toffee smiled mysteriously and crossed to inspect herself in the mantle mirror.

"I'm a wreck. You miss me while I fix up a bit?"

Marc fell into a chair as she left the room. He sat there regarding the apartment listlessly. It seemed to reflect his own life. Orderly, dignified, unexciting and infinitely lonely. Suddenly his reverie was interrupted by a knock at the door. He crossed and opened it. There, looking particularly miserable, stood Julie.

"I hope you'll excuse my coming here," she said timidly. "I've been waiting at the office for you all morning. I tried to call you here several times but there wasn't any answer. I decided to come over and wait for you. Its odd that Joseph didn't answer the phone.

"He wasn't in," said Marc. "Is something wrong?"

"Well, no—not exactly." Julie hesitated. "It's just that—well—it's just that—I want to quit my job with you, Mr. Pillsworth.

"What?" Marc's eyes widened with surprise.

"Yes, Mr. Pillsworth, I want to quit." The words came in a rush. "Now—today. I don't want to ever have to go back."

"But you mustn't leave." There was an immediacy in Marc's tone. "How would I get on without you? If it's a matter of salary—."

"No, it isn't that. You give me more than enough to get by on. As a matter of fact, I don't know where I'll ever get a better job."

Marc looked at her questioningly.

"Well, I don't know just how to explain it. It's just something that's come over me all of a sudden. I've a strange feeling that I'm wasting my life there, as if something were closing in on me to cut me off from everything I *really* want—as though the job itself were a menace to my happiness. I guess it came over me yesterday when your cousin—

"Niece," interrupted Marc.

"—When your *niece* was in the office. She seemed so gay, so much that I should be, but am not. It seemed only fair to talk to you first, before leaving." Marc glanced nervously toward the bedroom door.

"But what has the agency to do with it?"

"I wish I knew," said Julie. "It's just a feeling that I have."

"But I can't let you go, Julie," The note of urgency crept back into Marc's voice. "And you mustn't envy Toffee. You see, she's just escaping a dull existence herself—and only momentarily.

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She'll be returning soon. Perhaps right away." A sudden light came into Julie's eyes. "Besides, I know what you feel. I've felt the same thing myself for years. The trouble was that I let myself get used to it and after a time, I didn't know the difference. I'm sure I know how to help myself now and I think that I could help you too—if you'll let me—if you'll stay. Please don't leave, Julie."

As Julie listened to Marc, her expression became softly radiant.

"Perhaps you're right, Marc," she said quietly.

Marc reached out and took her hand in his. Suddenly, from behind the bedroom door, came the soft hiss of a shower. Instantly, Julie drew back.

"JOSEPH must be back," said Marc quickly.

"Taking a shower?"

"Oh, yes—he often takes showers this time of day. Very clean man. Says cleanliness is next to Godliness, or something of the sort. Very clean—spotless, you might say." Marc began to realize that he was babbling and stopped short.

"Of course," said Julie, smiling. "I should have remembered Joseph. It gave me rather a start, I thought we were alone.

"You'll be back in the morning then?" Marc asked anxiously. "Please say you will."

Julie regarded Marc thoughtfully.

"Yes," she said slowly. "It doesn't seem now that there was ever anything wrong." She turned toward the door.

"Julie—,"

"Yes?" She turned, and as she did so Marc caught her in his arms. He kissed her briefly and released her, stepping back embarrassedly. Julie smiled up at him for a moment and then said quickly:

"It's a wonderful job, I wouldn't quit for anything." The door closed softly behind her.

When Toffee entered the living room she found Marc staring out of the window with a curiously foolish grin. She stood beside him for a moment and looked out at the city.

"Go put some clothes on," he said. Toffee was wrapped in a huge towel, draped precariously over one shoulder.

"What for? At this moment, more of me is covered, than at any time since we met."

"Yes I guess so." For a moment they stood silently before the window.

"Toffee—," Marc began.

"Yes, Marc?"

"Why are you here? What is it you want—really?"

"My wish is for you Marc, it has been from the beginning. If I've caused you trouble, perhaps it was because you needed it. I'll be returning soon, but I can't help wanting to linger for a while."

"But how will your return be accomplished?"

"You'll know when the times comes." She smiled up at him. "Maybe it's time I put those clothes on after all." She went into the bed room.

Marc slumped into a chair. In a way he had enjoyed Toffee and her trouble, but now she would be in the way. "You'll know when the time comes," she had said. He was certain that the time had arrived, but he still hadn't any idea about sending her back to the subconscious. Perhaps it would be best to go back to the beginning. How had it started? He reviewed the strange occurrence over and over again. For the fifth time, he went back to the beginning. Suddenly, he brought his fist down on the arm of the chair.

"Of course, that's it," he murmured. "Her father was a Welsh." He laughed shortly. "It's so simple, I should have

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known all along.

AFTER a time, the bed room door flew open. Toffee was making a grand entrance. As she moved toward him, Marc thought briefly that he had never seen her so beguiling. At the center of the room, she paused.

"Isn't it wonderful? I like it even more than the black one."

"You might say, it leaves everything to be desired," said Marc.

"Oh?"

"—by some young swain," he added.

"Marc there just isn't any hope for you."

"I'd have agreed with you two days ago."

"And now?"

"Who knows?"

"I'm sure I don't."

"That's as it should be." Marc started for the bed room. "I could use a little sprucing up myself." At the door he turned back. "Suppose we make a special occasion of dinner tonight—go somewhere, where the food is especially good? I know a place that serves a wonderful welsh rarebit. I was there just night before last." Toffee's smile immediately disappeared and for a moment her eyes searched Marc's face, which had, suddenly, become quite serious. Her smile reappeared as suddenly as it had faded, but it seemed a bit more set.

"I'm sure I'll love it," she said.

Marc spoke slowly and his voice carried a touch of sadness.

"And remind me to stop by the drugstore for sleeping tablets. I ran out the other night."

"Sure Marc." Toffee looked away toward the window as Marc left the room.

THE countryside had somehow reassembled itself—as lovely and serene as before, with a blue mist playing about the trees. Toffee and Marc moved down the hillside toward a small valley obscured by the midst.

"I should be angry with you," said Toffee. "You didn't waste any time in sending me back, once you knew how."

"You said I'd know when the time came."

"How did you find out?"

"I kept wondering where it had all started, and then I remembered that foods sometimes cause certain kinds of dreams. Then too, I rememberedd that you had said that your father was a Welsh. I didn't have to be clever to put it all together and get welch rarebit, especially since it was the very thing I had eaten the first night. It all seemed pretty silly, but somehow it sort of fitted in with what's happened. You're not angry are you?" He looked down at her affectionately.

"Of course not, Marc. There's something you've forgotten. I exist only in your mind. I am as you see me. If I had stayed longer, if I had come to stand in the way of your happiness, I should have become ugly and wretched. I've served my purpose and its time for me to return. Really, you haven't so much to do with it as you suppose. It's been a wonderful adventure for me, Marc."

"I'm glad, Toffee," Marc said simply. "I'll never forget what you've done for me."

"Just remember Marc, that I'm not so unlike other, ordinary women. There is none of us who can remain lovely unless she does so in the eyes of a man whom she loves. Be good to Julie."

"You knew about Julie?"

"Of course," laughed Toffee. "I knew from the beginning, before you did. I know more about you than you do yourself. That's another point I hold in common with other women."

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They had reached the edge of the valley and suddenly Toffee stopped.

"This is where I have to leave you." She smiled up at Marc. Suddenly, he took her in his arms, very tenderly, and kissed her. As he released her, the bell began to ring in the distance, as it had before.

"Goodbye," Toffee said softly, starting toward the valley.

As she moved, the earth seemed to dissolve behind her, leaving a narrow chasm between them. With each step the bell became more and more distinct. Suddenly, impulsively, Marc turned toward her.

"Wait!" he called, and reached out a hand to her.

* * *

Marc's hand fell to the alarm clock and he awakened to a bright, new morning with a vague sense of loss. Suddenly he swung his legs over the edge of the bed and got to his feet.

Julie would be at the office. He didn't want to be late.

★ THE PUZZLE OF EXTINCTION ★

By PETE BOGG

FOR centuries naturalists have been mystified and intrigued by the disappearance of certain species of animals. No one really knows, even today, just why animals become extinct, but many guesses have been made in an attempt to find a solution to this puzzle of the ages.

About one hundred and thirty years ago Georges Cuvier, the great French naturalist, first carefully compared fossil bones with those from animals of his own time. He showed that most of the fossils belonged to types different from, yet in some way closely related to, living ones. Yet some of the animal skeletons Cuvier used could not be related to any animal of his day. Apparently the larger fossil animals, such as the mastodons and dinosaurs had disappeared from the face of the earth centuries before. When the last mastodon died, its line ended.

Studying the history of this planet brought to light many interesting facts which might account for the disappearance of the more terrifying prehistoric creatures. At one time great reptiles roamed through the land. There is some tangible evidence proving that the age of reptiles was brought to a close when phenomenal changes occurred in the earth's crust.

Scientist's know of an era of much violent volcanic action during which mountains rose out of the sea and whole continents vanished. Those terrifying events took place over a stretch of hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of years. Radical temperature changes made the world a colder and drier place then it had been before, too dry and cool for the swamp-dwelling reptiles. Those creatures gradually died out.

When man appeared on this planet, he became the dominant species because of his superior brain. With it he became the most effective agent for exterminating life that ever existed. Stone Age man was probably responsible for the extinction of the mammoths, mastodons, and giant ground sloths. Fire and spears challenged and defeated the huge clumsy beasts at every encounter. But the widest slaughter of the animal kingdom has occurred in recent times. Within the last few centuries the clearing of forests to make way for farm lands has cut down the living space for many wild animals.

Civilized man has devised means of bringing about the wholesale poisoning of undesirable animals taking many others along at the same time. Hunting for sport has greatly cut down the variety of species of wild ducks, and almost completely did away with the last Buffalo on the American plains.

Under natural conditions there are centain traits which in time threaten to bring about the extinction of certain animals. One of the outstanding cases of this kind is that of the now vanished Dodo bird. It lived at one time on the small island of Mauritus in the Indian Ocean. Besides being a large, ungainly, and peculiar looking bird, it could not fly. When it dominated that corner of its little world, the fact that it couldn't fly made no difference—but its ability to meet emergencies and protect itself were greatly lessened.

When the Portuguese and Dutch navigators, on their early voyages to seek the wealth of the Indies, landed on the island, they were delighted with the chance to get fresh meat. It was only necessary to walk up with a club and strike the Dodo on the head. The Dodo became extinct so quickly that no satisfactory specimen of it has been preserved. The loss of the power to fly had cost that bird its place on the Earth.

Animals who gradually lost the power to protect themselves are marked for extinction. Animals that are alive today remain so because they possess what the world of their time required. By gradual adaptation they have been able to make the adjustments needed in this changing world down through the centuries. Those weaker creatures have fallen out of the race for survival.

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Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

☆ RENE JUST HAÜY ☆

RENÉ Just Haüy, French mineralogist, was born in the little town of St. Just in France, on February 28, 1743. He was educated for the Church and took priestly orders, but, while teaching theology in Paris he became deeply interested in botany, as a result of attending the lectures of the noted naturalist, Dauberton. An accident directed his attention to crystallography. While handling a crystal of calcite, it dropped from his grasp and broke into fragments on the stone floor. While gathering these up he noticed that each fragment was, in its way, a crystal of the same form as that of the original. This interested him so greatly that he began the study of crystals of other minerals. Being a patient and keen observer he continued research in this branch of natural phenomena and became practically the founder of the science of crystallography, a department of knowledge which, since his day, has expanded and led to many important results in industry.

In 1793, after the Revolution—during which he suffered imprisonment and came near to losing his life—he was appointed a member of the Commission on Weights and Measures, and in the following year became keeper of the Cabinet of Mines. In 1802, under Napoleon, he was elected professor of mineralogy at the Museum of Natural History in Paris, to which institution he willed his remarkable collection of crystals.

The beautiful and rather rare mineral "hauynite" (or hauyne as it was first called), a sodium, calcium and aluminum silicate and sulphite, pleochroic and generally found only in eruptive rocks, was named in his honor. Haüy became a member of the French Academy, and published several books on his specialty, which are classic. In these he advanced the theory (which has since held good) that crystalline form should be the principal element in the determination of a mineral.

Inorganic—that is, non-vitalized—material, when in the solid state, appears in nature in two ways, either as a crystal or as an amorphous body like a mass of glass which, in cooling, will take any shape desired. Each member of the first category has its own habit of body making. The cause back of this seems to be a definite property of the unit molecule, under the impulse of which, when an assemblage of one kind is gathering, each one will dispose of itself along certain lines and in certain invariable directions if free to do so. Why this is the law is, as yet, one of the unsolved problems of science, which the crystallographers deprive of some of its mystery by alleging varying "coefficients of expansion" in each kind of molecule. At times such substances are found to be apparently arranged otherwise, showing no faces, bounding lines or angles of crystals to the eye, or even under the microscope. This condition is the result of the crowding by each other while in the act of growing in a confined space. Under such circumstances the substance is capable of exerting enormous force in following out the law of its being, as is well known in the case of water freezing. Massive quartz is another good illustration. Even here the unknown force or habit or property has not been absent during the process of solidification. This may be demonstrated by means of a sphere cut from an apparently amorphous mass of such material. When heated it will become distorted, expanding in several directions and more in one than in another, with the result that the figure will become a spheroid. Whereas a globe of glass when given the same treatment will retain its spherical shape.

CRYSTALLOGRAPHY is one of the exact sciences, with limited capacities, and these based upon mathematical laws. As knowledge in its phenomena increased, its devotees set to themselves the task of determining how many points in space were possible, under certain assumptions based on properties known by observation to be common to all crystals. It was found that only 32 exist. Of these, 23 had already been recognized, and 6 more were found shortly thereafter. Probably the remaining 3 have since been located in nature. All so far detected correspond absolutely with the theory underlying the system. These 32 kinds of known and possible crystal symmetries are now grouped under six systems, into one of which every known or conceivable form of that kind of entity can be gathered.

In addition to the geometrical law of crystallization associated with Haüy's name, he is also known for the observations he made in pyroelectricity. He died in Paris on June 3, 1822.

* * *

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A Little Knowledge

by H. B. Hickey

Tano sat down and opened the box. He looked curiously at the books and the pictures . . .

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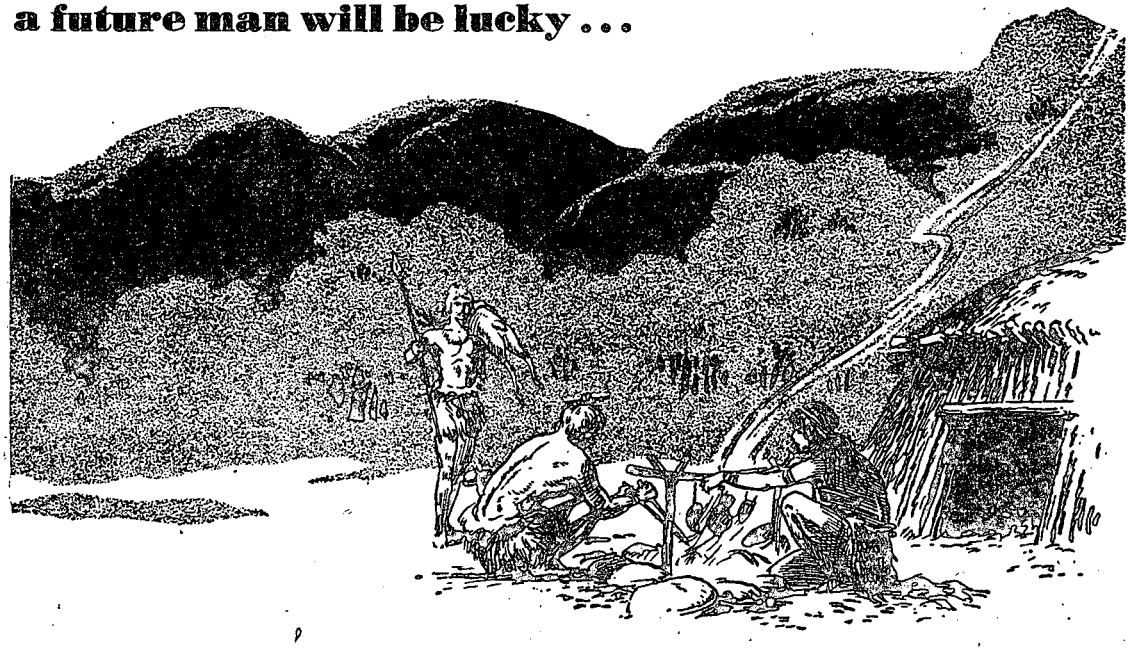
In past ages man had to learn the hard way. He didn't have a school to go to—he learned by experience. But maybe a future man will be lucky . . .



ALTHOUGH the valley seemed large to Tano because it was his whole world, it was in reality quite small. The stream that watered it came out of a pocket in the green rocks at one end and wandered for two miles until it disappeared again into the green rocks at the other end, and the valley was lined with fruit trees and soft grass with here and there a small clearing where the valley folk could gather.

Tano was eighteen years old and as tall as any man in the valley and almost as tall and broad as the stranger but he had the feeling that the stranger could have held the whole valley in the palm of his hand, such was the majesty of his bearing and his air of detachment. The stranger wore a white garment that flowed gracefully to his knees and on his feet a pair of leather sandals, and although his body seemed youthful his eyes were old and far-seeing.

He had entered the valley as the sun was sinking, carrying the wooden box on his shoulder and all the people had seen him and come to gather around him and watch him set the box down on the river bank while he refreshed himself with the clear cold water. They had never seen a stranger before but they were not afraid for there had never been anything in their lives to fear.

Amon, who was Tano's father, questioned the stranger in a wondering childlike tone. "From where do you come?" he asked.

When the stranger spoke his voice was low but all heard it and it seemed to echo softly from the sides of the valley and whisper back through the

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trees, and no one thought it odd that he should understand Amon and they him for they knew that he was a man and all men spoke the same tongue.

"I come from out there," the stranger said, smiling.

Amon smiled too, for he knew, and he knew the stranger knew, that there was no "out there," only an endless waste of shiny green rock. Did not the legends say so?

"Where then?" the stranger asked. Amon shrugged; like many questions this one had no answer. It was a fact that this man was here and was simply to be accepted as a fact which required no explanation. So simple were the people of the valley.

BUT Tano was young and his eyes were bright and questing and he dared to say what all were thinking. The man in the white cloak stopped smiling when he saw Tano's eyes but his voice was kindly as he asked again, "Where then?"

So Tano told him the legend he had heard from his father. How once there were many men, as the drops of water in the river were they, and the earth was fruitful everywhere. And then the same sun which had just sunk had come down and seared the earth and turned it hard and green and barren. And then there was only this valley and those who lived in it.

The moonlight was bright and the evening chill was descending and it was the first time Tano had told the legend. His eyes grew round with wonder at his own words and his skin prickled and there was a feeling in his stomach that was like hunger.

When Tano finished he asked simply, "Is that not the legend?"

The stranger's face had saddened and he replied, "It is. Once there were man men and wondrous wise they were. They built cities to the sky and they stole the heat from the sun and warmed the night with it and they could fly through the air like birds. But there was fear in their hearts and they were evil."

Tano's eyes were wide. This was more wondrous than the legend. At last he whispered, "What is 'fear'? What is 'evil'?"

The stranger looked at Tano's clean brown body, naked except for a loin cloth, and his clear brown eyes, and he tried to explain. But to explain those words he had to use other words. "Men fought with each other and killed each other," he told Tano. "And it was the men who brought down the sun and burned the earth."

"What is 'fought'?" asked Tano. "And what is 'killed'?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands but he smiled kindly at the youth. "Never mind," he said. "I must go now but I shall leave this box here. Tomorrow I shall return. While I am gone I want you to guard it and see that it is not opened. Otherwise terrible things will happen."

So the stranger went out of the valley and left the box behind and Tano did not go to sleep but sat in the moonlight and watched it.

TANO did not really want to open the box but he had never seen a box before and he wondered what it was. It could have been a nut—it was brown and hard and shiny—but if it was, it was the largest nut he had ever seen. It was half as high as he. It was also very heavy; he had tried to push it but for all his lean strength it did not budge. The sensation of immense power he had felt in the stranger was heightened.

As the night wore on Tano did not get tired, he only became more and

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more curious and after a time he could not stand it any longer. He went to the box and began to tug at it and to hit it and after he had given it a particularly hard thump with the heel of his palm the top bounced up a little. So at last Tano found out how to open it.

He was disappointed by what he found inside. Disappointed and at the same time more curious than ever. For inside the box there were only books, and since Tano could not read and had never seen a book he did not quite know what to do with one.

He smelled a book he had taken out and it had an old musty smell that was unfamiliar to him. It was plainly inedible.

Finally the book was opened and looked into but there was really nothing to see except some tiny black marks which meant nothing to him. Tano put the book back and took out another one.

This was filled with pictures and it needed no previous experience for him to know that he was looking at people just like himself. The pictures seemed to run in series, each series with its own cast of characters.

One in particular fascinated Tano. It showed a young man, looking much like the young men of Tano's acquaintance, who was engaged in making something. First, the man in the book cut a branch from a tree. Then he bent the branch almost double and tied some sort of thong to both ends. When that was done another branch — this time a smaller one — was fitted against the thong and drawn back to the ear. The last picture showed the thong being released.

It was all very fascinating but as Tano replaced the book and closed the box he had a feeling that the stranger had been playing a joke on him. Certainly nothing terrible had happened nor did it seem likely to happen.

LATE the next afternoon the stranger returned but by that time Tano had gone and another had taken his place. Silently, the stranger put the box back on his shoulder and prepared to leave the valley. It was Amon who stopped him.

Amon was smiling as he asked the question the valley people had been wondering about all day. He really expected no answer.

"Please tell us," he begged, "since you seem to know so much more than we do, will there ever again be many men and will they again be able to do such wonderful things? Such as to fly like birds?" he added slyly.

Then it was that the stranger caught a glimpse of Tano. The young man was off by himself at the edge of the clearing on the river bank. In one hand he held a length of grass rope while with the other he tried to break off a low hanging branch from a tree.

The stranger's voice was no louder than it had been the day before but now when he spoke it seemed that a cold wind came forth and chilled the people of the valley, and his words were ominous and for the first time they knew fear. But his voice was sad.

"Indeed they will," he told Amon. "They shall fly like the birds and turn the night into day and the air will be filled with their singing." He paused for a moment. "And many other things." He turned and was gone.

Tano did not see him go. Tano had at last torn the branch from the tree and now he had bent it almost double and was trying to fasten the rope to it. He was happy for he was making something. It would be interesting to see how it turned out.

THE END

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ANDROCLES AND THE BUCCANEER

By GEOFFREY St. REYNARD

Professor Androcles didn't believe in pirates—until he saw one with his own eyes

Once upon a time in ancient Rome there lived a slave.

PROFESSOR ANDROCLES stopped beneath a street light, removed his right glove, unbuttoned his topcoat, undid his scarf, opened his coat and took from a pocket of his vest a thin gold watch. He squinted at it in the sad and foggy light which fell, literally fell, like a shower of palpable sorrow rather than an illumination, from the cracked and dirty globe. "Mm-hmm," he muttered. Replacing the watch, the scarf, and the glove, Professor Androcles stepped off again into the brisky cool darkness of the October night. The gloom was more companionable than the unfriendly and bitter fog of the electric light.

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The man was sitting on the steps of the library, his head in his hands

"Jolly out tonight; wonder if they'd mind my being a bit late?" said Professor Androcles aloud. "Suppose I take a turn around the library before I go in?"

"Right you are," he answered himself. "Turn around the library it is."

He threw back his shoulders, stiffened his spine, and to the rhythm of a murmured "tum, tum, tum-tum-tum," went striding down the concrete path beside the gloomy hulk of the college library. He had been reading all afternoon in the works of a certain British writer of detective stories, and ever since leaving home he had been chatting amiably with himself in what he considered to be curt and forceful Scotland Yard language.

Professor Androcles was a youngish-

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middle-aged gentleman, stocky with inclinations toward tubbiness; high of forehead and sensitive of feature, with full lips and very clear blue eyes. He taught eight classes of Palaeontology and two of Archaeology at the college, he was married, with no children, and he smoked but he did not inhale.

And this slave after many years ran away from his master and hid himself in a certain cave.

Momentarily as he marched the vision of his wife came to him. . . . He thrust it aside with an impatient sniff. To give him justice, he did not at all realize he had done it; had someone informed him that he did not like to think about his wife when he was out of her sight, he would have been struck dumb. He was a loving and a dutiful husband. Somehow he had never connected his wife with his secret wish to join the French Foreign Legion. Was it because she bored him—him, staid, humorless little Professor of Palaeontology that he seemed—was it because she bored and irritated him that he often thought of life in other and more romantic climes?

Preposterous!

She was such an agreeable, clinging little thing. Not every strong on Palaeontology, of course, not strong at all; but so masterful on other subjects! Such as umbrellas and wearing one's overshoes if it were cloudy.

It had occurred to many of his friends and her acquaintances at one time or another that the lady Androcles had a character remarkably like a slab of fatty bacon with a steel spring concealed in the middle. Such a comparison would have bewildered the Professor no end.

Anway, he went on thinking about Scotland Yard.

In the cave he came upon a great lion.

TAKING the turn with a neat right-face that left a long scuffed place on the side of one shoe and a corresponding scratch on the other, he continued his quick-march down the library walk. The full Halloween moon lit the landscape here with greater brilliance than on the tree-shaded streets and he breathed deeply and felt odd little thrills pass over his backbone.

"Witches!" said Professor Androcles aloud. "By Jove, warlocks!"

"Wot?"

The Professor's romantic heart gathered itself, bent its knee slightly, and hurled itself up against his palate. With a great spasm of self-control he kept from breaking into frantic flight, and even succeeded in slowly coming to a halt; glancing first over his right shoulder (nothing), then over his left (nothing), and then all along the library wall (no one). Looking up expectantly at the moon, he saw nothing across it save a few fleecy clouds; and scrutinizing the ground before him, he again detected nothing and no one.

"Hm," he muttered. "Ahem," said he, clearing his throat a trifle too heartily. "Nothing, nothing at all," he declared.

"Lyke 'ell there ain't," said a loud-raucous Voice somewhere near at hand. "There's a blinking pebble in me boot."

"Aouch!" shouted the same raucous Voice a moment later, as Professor Androcles, halting in his tracks, felt his muscles freeze, his nerves congeal, and the blood in his rigid veins turn to trickling ice water.

"Hi sye," it continued in a quieter tone, "give us an 'and, will yer?"

"Whh," husked the Professor, "Whh, that is, where are you?"

And then, bursting upon his vision like a crack in a plate, which one sees

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after looking at it a dozen times, there was the man sitting on the back steps of the library where he had been all the time.

"Oh," sighed the Professor in relief, "oh, there you are. I didn't see you."

"I 'ad me 'ead bent dahn," explained the figure lucidly.

Uncrossing his legs, the man leaned back against the heavy iron-banded door. By the light of the moon he was a strange sight. What writers used to call lantern-jawed, with a heavy moustache and thick gold rings in his ears, he was dressed in a florid gold and scarlet jacket, short loose trousers of black velvet and high leather sea-boots. His fierce good-humoured face was topped by a flaming kerchief and set atop this was a sort of Napoleonic hat with a rude skull drawn in white paint across the upturned brim. At his side was a very long and extremely heavy cutlass without a scabbard.

But instead of devouring him, the lion thrust forth his paw, in which there was a long thorn; and this the slave at once extracted.

"Hi sye," the man repeated, the Cockney accent thick as good mushroom soup, "will yer give us an 'and?"

Professor Androcles walked over and sat down beside him. Taking off his gloves and pushing back his felt hat, he wiped his brow.

"You gave me a fright. I thought it was a witch."

"Garn! Did yer?"

"Yes, I really did. Halloween, you know. The witching hour."

"No doubt. Abaht this pebble in me boot. . . ."

"Oh, I am sorry! What can I do?"

"Well, wouldjer mind 'aving a go at pulling it orf?"

The Professor arose and put on his gloves again. "Good heavens, certainly. Stick your foot out."

The man braced himself against the step and thrust out his leg. "Pull 'er 'ard," he admonished.

Androcles tugged at the black boot. It gripped the foot firmly. He shut his eyes and wrenched at it. Suddenly it came loose and with a clatter the Professor and the sea-boot rolled down a couple of steps and onto the hard pavement. The gaudily-dressed man limped down and gave him a hard knotted hand.

"Sorry, guv'nor. There, that's orl ryte. Now let's see this 'ere pebble."

Standing on one leg he disclosed the sole of his left foot. Imbedded in it was a great jagged piece of rock. He detached it with a grimace.

"Ooo!" The dark blood ran freely.

With a compassionate cry Professor Androcles yanked off his white silk scarf and, with never a though of the sweet and patient little wife who had given it to him with instructions to keep it clean *or else,* he tore it in half and swiftly bound up the wound.

And the lion was enormously grateful.

"DO YOU think you can walk now?"

The man tested his foot gingerly. "Ar."

"Then I'll take you up to the doctor's office—I don't suppose you know where it is?"

"Oo wants a sawbones? That'll be orl ryte tomorrer, thankyer kyndly, guv'nor." Pensively he blew his nose without benefit of handkerchief. "Hi sye, it's bloody kind of yer."

The Professor waved away the gratitude. "Oh, no. Not at all." He reseated himself beside the man and scratched his cheek reflectively. "I don't want to be inquisitive, but, ah, aren't you, ah, a pirate?"

"We lykes to think of ourselfs as buccaneers."

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"Sorry."

"'S'all ryte."

The pair set in silence, contemplating the moon and the injustice of bloody pebbles in bleeding boots.

"Hi sye," muttered the brawny buccaneer tentatively.

"Yes?"

"Just wot *is* this plyce?"

Professor Androcles mentioned the name of the little college town.

"Get aht! Where's thet?"

"In America."

"Coo! 'Ow the 'ell did we get 'ere?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say."

"Out o' Plymouth, we are, and bound for Maracaibo." He spat. "Where would thet be from 'ere, myte?"

"Sure I couldn't say," repeated little Professor Androcles, rather ashamed of himself. He had absentmindedly wound the torn bit of scarf around his neck again. "You know, I'm afraid you've got yourself involved in the wrong cycle of time, or something."

"Thet's as may be. The cap'n sent me out to reckon-oyster."

Another period of silence followed.

"Well," said the Professor at last, "I must be getting off to my Palaeontology class."

"Garn! Come 'ave a nip first. Hit ain't every dye a chap meets another chap wot's so friendly an' elpful. Any taverns abaht?"

The unbidden remembrance of his pretty wife laying down the law about alcohol came before his eyes. "Oh, I couldn't, really. I'm late now."

"Just one four o' gin, 'ot. Not be a minute."

"I'm sorry, honestly."

"I'm thirsty, ain't you?" whined the buccaneer.

"Oh, well, I don't suppose I'd have to drink anything," said the Professor weakly. "Let's go down to Happy John's."

"Thet's the spirit! 'Ere, give us your shoulder, guv'nor." The pair went up the walk and around the library to the main street, the buccaneer's arm over the little man's shoulders. They walked several blocks and furtively entered a brightly-lit place of smells and sounds.

"Ar," said the buccaneer approvingly. *"Ar."*

Professor Androcles, who had never been in Happy John's Place before in his life, put one foot on the brass rail as they did in the best books and leaned upon the dingy woodwork of the bar. The pirate did the same.

"Lumme, 'ere's a rum plyce!"

"Yes, isn't it!"

Happy John himself came up to take their order, leered pleasantly at seeing one of the strait-laced faculty members in his den, and said, "What'll it be, Professor?"

"Two of rum, 'ot," said the buccaneer.

"Aha, ha, ha," said Happy John tonelessly. "What'll it be, Professor?"

"Ginger a—"

"Two of rum, 'ot, I says," reiterated the buccaneer. He was a rare old leather tone, Androcles suddenly noticed; his face creased and pitted with much buffeting and beating by winds. He was certainly an attractive man. By Jove, what would my wife think?

"Aha, ha, ha," said Happy John again, with an edge to his voice. "What'll it be, Pro—"

The buccaneer reached over the bar and lifted Happy John, who was a portly man full of his own wares, halfway across the wood by his throat. "Are you going to get us two of rum, 'ot, or am Hi gowing to give yer a swipe across the snith wif me cutlass?" he growled menacingly.

Happy John's assistant flung a hotplate on the counter, clattered a sauce-

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pan onto it and spilled in the most of a fifth of Jamaica rum. "Two hot rums comin' up," he squealed.

HAPPY JOHN was restored intact to his friends and his relations.

"Blime if I ever see such manners in a pub," said the buccaneer to Professor Androcles. " 'Cut 'is throat awt if you 'adn't been along, guv'nor."

The Professor gagged over his first heated rum (in point of fact, it was the first drink of rum of any temperature).

The buccaneer swilled his appreciatively. "Thet's better. See 'ere, myte, where did yer sye yer 'ad to go to?"

"My Palaeontology class. Evening class, you know, class in the evening, after supper, that it, my what fiery stuff this is, hot I mean, isn't it?" said the Professor rapidly and distinctly.

"Ar. Well, nah then, why don't we just stye 'ere for the evenin'? I don't 'ave to get back ter the Erring till midnight, an' you won't mind missin' this wot-ever-it-is, will yer?" He shuffled his feet and looked down. "Coo lumme, I 'ates to sye it ryte aht but I likes yer, see? Yer a top-'ole bloke. Yer orl ryte."

The Professor came all of a glow and mumbled inanely.

"Buck up, old cock. 'Abits is myde ter be bruk, skip a night and you'll be orl the better. . . . 'Ave another."

"Oh, well, if you insist. Just one, and then why don't you come to the Palae-palae-palae, to the class with me, eh? Give them all a treat."

"The little apes," he added after his second hot rum. "The young swine. Give them a lesson tonight they won't forget. Tell 'em what rot this Palaestuff is, good heavens yes, bless my soul." He relapsed into a truculent murmur.

They emerged in due course into the cool night air, which sobered the Professor with horrible suddenness and caused him to lean against a tree and tremble violently while he visualized what his wife would say and his colleagues do if the escapade got out. He gave a little moan. He must be quite mad.

So after some time this slave was cought and condemned to perish in the arena.

DOCTOR JENNINGS SCOTT and Instructor William Alfred were playing double solitaire in the faculty lounge. When he had lost his third game Doctor Scott raised his head and listened intently.

"Do you hear anything?" he asked Instructor Alfred.

"Yes," said that young man, gazing in an abstract manner at the queen of spades, "that's the Palaeontology class."

"No, no. There it is again! Like singing."

"Singing and dancing and breaking up the furniture," said Instructor Alfred. "It's still the Palaeontology class. Where's old Androcles?"

Doctor Scott snapped out a brisk oath. "Hang it!" said he. "Will you listen. It's a bass voice singing some obscene song or other. Do you suppose some of the Juniors are drunk?"

"Probably. Halloween, y'know," said the younger man in a faraway voice.

Doctor Scott stepped with fine impatience to the door and opened it. The racket from the Palaeontology class swelled out as he did so, and at the same moment the two men heard a loud bawling of "When Dysie bruk the 'ead of Tommy Bla-ackridge!"

Doctor Scott took hold of the door jamb and stared in disbelief as Professor Androcles and his buccaneer hove in sight. The Professor was cold sober

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and rather fluttery inside.

"Ah there, Doctor Scott," said he humbly.

Doctor Scott, joined by Instructor Alfred, who was still holding the queen of spades, straightened up and sternly frowned upon the spectacle. "What is the meaning of this, Androcles?" said he icily.

"Err—what?" mumbled the Professor.

"This—this masquerade. I realize clearly that this is Halloween, but a man of *your*—"

The Professor restrained his caroling companion with difficulty. "Well, the fact is. . . . Well, this gentleman is a buccaneer, a pirate y'know, who happens to have shore leave for a few hours; I'm showing him the town and I thought I'd just stop by and—err—dismiss the Palaeontology class for the evening."

"What the devil do you think you're talking about, Androcles?"

The lean invisible hand of Unanswerable Authority took hold of the Professor's left ear. It tweaked that organ vigorously. The Professor shuddered, the habits of an obedient lifetime weighing his will down inexorably.

"Uhh," said Professor Androcles, "uhh, perhaps I'd better conduct the class at that." He looked apologetically at the buccaneer.

THAT individual was regarding him with horror—yes, horror and pained surprise.

"Are you gonner let this fishy-fyced bloke, which ain't even got a cutlass, myke yer gow to thet blooming whatsit arfter all?"

The Professor, vacillating like a weather-cock in a wind spout, fidgeted from one foot to the other. He looked at Authority, his tyrant.

He looked at his new-found comrade, and surprised in his green eyes traces of moisture and an expression like a beaten bull-pup.

"Why, heavens above!" said he to himself, "this chap's disappointed in me!"

And he stood up straight, because of such insignificant things are the crowbars forged which break the spokes in the wheels of servility, and he took a deep, long, free breath.

"Oh, well, dear me, come on, old man," said Professor Androcles to the buccaneer, "I think we've wasted enough time here. Let's go tell 'em off."

And in the arena the slave found himself side by side with the very lion which he had succoured, this giving him great confidence; and the audience expectantly watched for him to be torn to bits.

Doctor Scott, dark in the face, put up a hand as though to restrain him.

The buccaneer, who had been scanning the skinny form of Doctor Scott with distaste, stepped forward and thrust his gigantic cutlass under the man's nose. At the same time Professor Androcles noticed that there was a pink wart on the tip of that nose, a repellent wart, a truly ugly brute of a whacking great wart. He detested warts. As a matter of fact, he realized, he had never really cared much for Doctor Scott himself, who was now cowering back against the jamb looking like something out of Cruikshank. He sniggered. An odd feeling possessed him, a positive rebellion was seething away in his breast.

"Excuse me," said Instructor Alfred mildly, and faded away.

"Wot do yer sye, guv'nor," queried the buccaneer, still poising the weapon under Doctor Scott's nose, "cawn't I swipe 'im one?"

"No, let's let him go."

"Just as you sye."

Reluctantly the cutlass was lowered.

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Doctor Scott opened his mouth several times like a pale goldfish and croaked, "Is this gug-gug-gentleman intoxicated, Androcles?"

"Certainly not."

"Where did he g-get that outfit?"

"It's his own suit, of course."

"Well then what *is* he?"

"Oh, I've told you. He's a buccaneer."

"But—but how? How!"

"Oh, how should I know?" the Professor asked petulantly. "Something slipped in the cycles of time, I suppose. The dimensions got mixed. Time's going wrong. How should I know? Ask Einstein."

"He-he-he," said Doctor Scott faintly, slipping down to his knees and fingering his lower lip. Professor Androcles gazed upon him, astounding personification of Authority unmasked. He stiffened his spine and gave a little shrug of his shoulders. "Come on, old chap," said he to his friend in the strong clipped speech of Scotland Yard, "shall we be off?"

Outside the door of his lecture hall he halted. "I suppose I honestly oughtn't to do this," said he. "After all, they're paying me to teach the young idiots Palaeontology."

The buccaneer looked mournful. "Hi sye," he said sadly, "yer might walk dahn to the Erring wif us anywye."

Professor Androcles patted his scarlet-draped shoulder. "Of course I will. Just you wait here a minute."

THE Palaeontology class began to calm down as the Professor stepped into the lecture hall. They wondered what he would say; they thought it would be rich. Here was the man who was known to his classes as The Last Absent-Minded Professor, the only man in the world who still said "bless my soul."

He waited standing by the door until they were perfectly quiet.

"You can all go to hell," said Professor Androcles to his Palaeontology class.

The lion showed him such affection that the hearts of the spectators were melted.

Strolling once more through the quiet college town, Professor Androcles and the buccaneer were silent. They felt a great pervading comradeship. They linked arms in response to a common thought and when the buccaneer began without warning to sing *Bell Bottom Trousers* the professor joined in heartily. He had forgotten that he knew the vulgar old song, but miraculously the words came back to him. When they had sung twelve verses they found themselves opposite Happy John's Place.

"Well?" queried the buccaneer.

"Well?" replied Professor Androcles roguishly.

They marched in.

"Two of rum, hot," ordered the Professor. This time there were no misunderstandings. They sat in a booth and had four apiece. They sang *Bell Bottom Trousers* again all the way through, and then they threw a waiter into the juke box and the buccaneer taught Professor Androcles the real original version of Fifteen Men, which caused the little man to turn red all over and feel excessively wicked; and then they had a couple of quick hot rums to keep out the dampness, and set sail.

They careened through town, not noticing much of anything, and out through the quiet streets and to the edge of a dark meadow where the fogs were drifting in.

"Martin's Meadow," said Androcles, halting there with a hollow ball of cold nothing in the pit of his stomach. "I

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say, the sea's just out there."

"Yerss, I cyme acrost this field tonight."

They stood silently, watching the fog roll past.

"Come on dahn and see the Erring, anywye, old boy," said the buccaneer awkwardly.

"Can't do any harm."

They crossed the dank meadow. The sea was fresh and stinging in their nostrils.

" 'Ere we are."

A small boat lay at their feet, her painter tied to a stump at the water's edge. They stood arm in arm for a space, saying nothing, pleasantly choked by that odd brotherly affection which had sprung up between them. Then the buccaneer jumped down into the boat and seated himself on a thwart. He stared up at Professor Androcles.

"We're bound for Maracaibo, yer know," he said temptingly.

"There's plenty of gold, so I've been told, in the vaults of Maracaibo," misquoted the Professor in an abstracted voice.

"Gold and jewels and wenches fit ter blawst yer eyes aht," asserted the buccaneer.

"Money for jam," he added.

"Big doubloons and pieces of hyte," he cajoled.

Professor Androcles gazed out over the ocean to where a riding-light glowed high through the fog. What a fine tall ship the Herring must be!

"But my wife. . . ."

The buccaneer laughed loudly. "We'll run 'er topsyles dahn by sunup," he shouted.

The Professor thought of his wife. She was a good enough wife as wives go, but she didn't like loud socks and cold lobster, and she was down on liquor. And she always had tomato soup on Sunday nights.

So they were permitted to leave the arena together.

I COULD grow a moustache at last," he murmured.

"Grow an 'ole blooming beard if yer lyke. Buck up, guv'nor! Come along!"

From the darkness where the tall ship lay came a faint hail in the same fantastic Cockney dialect. It was answered with a string of oaths, and a parrot screeched sharply into the sound.

Professor Androcles leaped down into the dinghy. He settled himself on a thwart and grasped an oar with unpracticed but eager hands.

"For goodness sakes, stop babbling and let's go," said Professor Androcles.

The buccaneer cast off the painter and together they began to row into the night.

* * *

And they both lived happily ever after.

THE END

JUST PLAIN HORSE SENSE

★ **By GARY LEE HORTON** ★

HOW much sense is there in your barnyard friend, the horse? Not much, you might answer, but did you ever hear the story of Clever Hans?

Hans was a five-year-old German horse who lived at the beginning of the present century. Though there was nothing unusual about him in his physical appearance, this amazing beast had been taught to answer questions and solve problems difficult enough to stump the ordinary schoolboy twice his age. His owner and trainer, Herr von Osten, was almost as bewildered about Hans' brilliance as the thousands who came to see the horse go through his paces.

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Since the horse could not speak, von Osten set up an ingenious system of communication. A letter system was established on a numbered chart; for example, if the letter "m" occurred in the fourth vertical column and the second horizontal column of the chart, Hans would tap four times with his left hoof and two times with the right. Similarly, a number system was established in which taps with the right foot stood for units, and taps with the left foot stood for tens. Thus 45 was represented by four taps with the left foot and five with the right.

It was claimed that Clever Hans knew figures and letters, colors and tones, the calendar and the dial. He could read and count, deal with decimals and fractions, and recognize people from having seen their photographs.

As his fame spread, two commissions of scientists were sent to examine him at successive times. A pyschologist on the second commission, Otto Pfungst of Berlin University, strove to solve the mystery of Hans' astounding intelligence. He attempted to demonstrate that Hans responded to subconscious "cues" from von Osten, such as slight movements of the head and changes in facial expression, however slight and unintentional. The horse, then, would tap with one hoof until he received one of these hidden signals, and then he would switch to the other, stopping at another signal.

This answer seemed sufficient, until other members of the commission pointed out that clever Hans performed even when von Osten was not present. Another set of investigators came forth with the conclusion that Hans' cleverness was due partially to telepathy and partially to hypnotic influence.

Clever Hans is dead. But the mystery surrounding his amazing feats still lives to baffle us; can a horse learn to solve problems as you and I?

CANCER MAY BE CURED!

☆ By H. R. STANTON ☆

CANCER, today, is the leading cause of death among women. One out of every five women who dies between the ages of 35 and 65 dies of cancer.

However, thousands of cancer victims die needlessly every year in our country for lack of early treatment. These sufferers could be rescued because their tumors attack parts of the body that are accessible. Several instances of accessible cancers are of the skin, lip, mouth, throat, and of the cervix. These parts may be easily reached not only by surgeons but by the magic of high-voltage X-rays and radium. In the hands of skilled operators, X-rays and radium are now as safe for patients as they are deadly for cancer.

Cancer may be defined as an unlawful growth of the individual's own tissue. It is not contagious or infectious. It cannot be contracted by handling cancerous tissue, nor will a single blow or injury start a cancer.

It's advisable to hurry to the doctor at the first suspicion of a disease so deadly; when, for instance, you have a persistent sore, or an unexplained bleeding from the body. It is the delay, ignorance and fear that cause most of the deaths from cancer today.

It is not surprising that the majority of cancer victims pass the curable local stage before seeking medical advice while the chance for life is still present. The reasons for this is; absence of pain; fear of the knife; and the fact that the new healing power of X-rays and radium is still clouded by reports of accidents.

One of the most fantastic events in human history is the scientific transformation of X-rays and radium from agents of death to givers of life. X-rays in their crude original form actually caused cancers that they now can cure. Surgeons and doctors were burned while experimenting with the fierce rays, and these injuries broke down into tumors that destroyed fingers, hands and arms before cancer put an end to their agony.

Madame Curie paid with her own life 40 years after helping her husband discover the power of radium. Many other men died to make X-rays safe weapons against death.

The trials of the rays taught doctors to be cautious with every kind of cancer. Tumors of the stomach, intestines, lungs, bones, and kidneys seemed resistant to the new radiation. The doctors warned that cases of such nature must be treated with surgery. Every cancer passes through a stage when it's curable; either by surgical removal or radiation.

Now that effective doses of rays can be given, without fear of radiation sickness or burns, there's new hope for sufferers from all cancers that are accessible and have not yet spread through the different parts of the body.

Healthy men and women who were declared by surgeons to be utterly beyond the reach of the knife are alive today because of radiation treatment.

Thus this new science, if we would build the X-ray machines, buy the radium, and especially if we'd train the raymarksmen, could save 50,000 lives each year from cancer that's accessible, and it will save more victims as soon as people learn to have their cancers treated early, while their peril is local. Advances in radiation have reached the stage where we can offer hope for cure without fear of mutilation. When people know that, they will not be afraid to come early.

Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood. It is, therefore, up to every individual to win the war against this once dread disease. You—and you alone—can beat cancer.

* * *

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DEATH WEARS A ROSE

by Alexander Blade

When someone you love is dead there seems to be nothing left in life, unless you *know* someone is still with you . . . .

HILLTOP HOUSE looked cold and remote that afternoon, as I wheeled the coupe up the drive from the main gate and pushed the gas pedal down a little harder to make the hill. It must be the funeral, and the unpleasant associations one has toward a house with a black wreath on the door. A wreath that contrasted in a startling manner with the creamy yellow of the house itself.

The coldness was there, though, and it struck me hardest when Alice Kern opened the door in answer to my knock. Alice was Jean's younger sister, and Jean's death had hurt her deeply. I saw that hurt on her pale face in her moist grey eyes. Alice was as lovely as her sister, with a quiet beauty that made her seem almost immaculately untouchable.

"Come in, Mark," she took my hand and I tried to tell her in that handclasp how sorry I was.

"Larry called me," I said. "I was just leaving for Chicago. I drove up right away."

Larry Fargo was Jean's husband, and he had hardly been able to speak when he told me over the phone of his wife's death.

I followed Alice into the hall. I purposely avoided looking to the right, where I knew Jean's coffin would occupy the place of honor in the living room.

"Larry took it pretty hard," Alice said. She was trying to make conversation. Talk when there was nothing more to be said.

I took my coat and hat off and put them in the closet.

"I know," I said. "Alice, forgive me for making you feel worse than you do already, but this was a blow to me. It came unexpectedly. How did it happen? Jean has always been in good health."

Her eyes came up slowly and met mine. I sensed surprise in them.

"Didn't Larry tell you?"

I shook my head.

"He—didn't say very much. Broke down."

She understood.

"Prince trampled her to death."

I tried not to show amazement. Jean had ridden the black horse for years. Prince had always been gentle, well trained. Alice sensed my amazement.

"Jean was riding down by the creek. Prince must have been frightened by a car at the point where the bridle path crosses Highway 27. He threw her off and his front feet hit her—in the face."

Her last words faltered and died in a whisper.

"My God," I whispered.

Unconsciously I looked toward the living room. No sound came from

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there. Jean was alone, lost in the sunlight that streamed in the big windows, hidden under bowers of roses.

"She—must have been . . ."

I could say no more.

"She's in a closed coffin," Alice said, and answered my unfinished question.

Larry Fargo came downstairs. Larry and I had been in business together for eight years. We started as kids, both courting Jean, both proudly writing our business letters under the heading of—"Fargo and Jenning—Aviation Engineers."

Larry was exhausted. His handsome face was drawn and devoid of color. He shook my hand mechanically.

"I'm glad you came. The Chicago deal can wait. Jean would have wanted you."

Jean would have wanted you.

That cut. I tried not to show it, but it hurt.

Jean, Larry and I started as kids. At thirty, I was half owner of one of the most successful engineering laboratories in the country. I owed it to Larry in part, but mostly to Jean. She had been devoted to both of us. Her good sense had put us on our feet. It was one of those three way partnerships, where Larry got the girl finally and I had to move down to an apartment in Detroit and leave them alone at Hilltop House. I wouldn't stay there after their marriage.

I forced my mind back to the reality of the situation. I was glad that Alice was here. Alone, we would have been just a couple of over-grown boys, faced with the loss of our boss—our partner in life. Alice balanced the party a little. She added strength to it.

"I'll make some sandwiches," she said. "We *do* have to eat."

She was right. We tried to eat. The funeral would take place in the afternoon.

I ATE half a sandwich and forced down a cup of coffee. Alice let Peterby the undertaker in, then came back in the kitchen. I could hear Peterby making the last minute preparations in the living room. Cars started to roll up the drive.

I wondered how you conducted yourself at the funeral of your beloved. It would always be my secret, this love for Jean. I loved her as much as Larry had. More, I believed, but I suppose that was a natural feeling to have.

After a while Larry said:

"Most of them are here now. I guess we'd better go in."

Peterby had met Jean's many friends at the door. God bless Peterby. The little man took our place; I don't think many of us could have done the job. It would have been too much like the parties we had had, when Jean, Larry and I stood in line to greet our guests.

I admired Alice a great deal. She had always stayed in the background—handled the necessary business of the house. Now she went into the living room with us and sat between us on the hard, wooden chairs. Peterby sat near the coffin and Reverend James Appleby read a quiet sermon. We knew the people who were there. We spoke to some of them, felt their hands grip our own, then drop in silent understanding.

I sat there and I might have sat alone. I thanked God that I wouldn't have to look at Jean.

Someone was talking. I guess it was Appleby. It seemed to me that he was long-winded. I wanted him to shut up and get it over with. I wanted to think of Jean as she used to be, a red rose in her hair.

A red rose.

Then I knew what it was that affected me so strangely. The room

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was filled with the sweetness of roses. I had hardly thought of the flowers. My eyes traveled hesitantly toward the coffin. The very thought of what it contained made me want to cry. The crying was all done inside.

The coffin was buried in red roses. This was the season for roses and everyone had known Jean's love for the red ones with rich, fragrant blooms.

Gradually a feeling of horror crept over me. I couldn't explain it, but I could feel the muscles of my face tighten. My jaws were set and my fists, damp with perspiration were clenched. Roses. I hated them. I hated what they symbolized—my last visit with Jean—the last time I would be near her.

The perfume of the roses, it seemed to me, grew so strong in the room that it drowned out everything else. I wondered why the others didn't seem to notice. Didn't look at each other, or comment on the heavy deathlike fragrance of them.

I stole a quiet look around me.

I'm sure that Larry and Alice noticed. Alice was pale and her hands were clenched in her lap. Larry sat a little forward in his chair, his eyes concentrating on the minister. Little red veins stood out on his forehead. I had seen them that way before, when he was working under extreme tension.

No one else seemed to notice. They were listening to Appleby, and it seemed to me that their attention was p o l i t e—more or less detached, as though they were ready to run away when it was over and forget the whole thing.

My eyes went back to the roses. I was aware that Appleby had finished. People moved about the room. Still, that strong, lush perfume held me spellbound. It hurt my nostrils. I wanted to get out of the room. *I had to get out.*

Somehow the roses were signalling me. Were bringing a message. I was sure of that. I have always been sensitive to smells. Once a rose had symbolized love and beauty.

Now I was breathing in the heavy fragrance of death.

ALICE touched my arm.

"The car is waiting," she said. "The others are ready to go."

I stood up. I must have been in a trance. The coffin was gone. Men were carrying out the roses. I stood there, shaking, trying to control myself.

"I'm not going," I said. "I don't belong. You and Larry can go with her. She—wouldn't—want . . ."

My voice broke. I was acting like a fool. I was thankful that Alice understood. I guess she had always known how hard it had been for me when Jean chose Larry.

"I'll tell them that you are ill," she said softly. "Mark—I'm t e r r i b l y sorry . . ."

I squeezed her hand and tried to smile.

"You're a good kid," I said. "You always were."

I watched her go out.

The essence of roses wouldn't leave the house. It wouldn't go with Jean to her grave. It persisted after the last crimson bloom was carried out. It hung heaviest in the living room where Jean had been.

Roses for blood and death.

The smell followed me about the house. It was always in my way—seeping into my head, into my brain. It hung heavy in the hall, in the kitchen. I went outside to escape it, and it followed me. This time it came from the tall fresh blooms in the garden—Jean's garden. I sat on the bench

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in the garden for a time but I couldn't stand it there.

I started walking down the hill toward the highway. I wished the others would come back. Wished them to say it was all over—done with.

I crossed the bridle path.

Even down here, away from the house and the garden, the terrible, heady scent of roses hung on the clear air.

My heart said that it was my imagination—my love for Jean, that made the odor of roses follow me.

But there was another message.

Somehow I knew Jean was still here. I remembered her with a rose in her hair, her lithe figure moving gracefully down the lawn, her smile as bright as the cloudless afternoon.

I turned right at the bridle path. God knows, I didn't want to. I went along it, remembering Prince, remembering what Alice had said. Where the bridle path crossed Highway 27, I hesitated. This was where she had died. Here the smell of death was strongest. It seeped into my head, making me sick and dizzy. Death should be horrible. It should smell of rotten flesh and thick blood.

Here, death smelled of roses.

There were hoof prints in the sod. There was a bit of cloth. I picked it up. A shred of Jean's scarf. I had given it to her a week before she and Larry announced their engagement. It was made of parachute silk and I had used that chute in my first jump. I thought it would mean a lot to her. I decided afterward that I was wrong. I had been sentimental and boyish.

Gradually, as I associated this spot with Jean's death, I hated it. I hated and *feared* it. The fear came so slowly that I hardly knew how to catalogue it in my own mind. It was a fear—a sense of violence as yet a mystery, that would strike if I stayed.

I started to walk away swiftly. I didn't look back. I would never go back to that spot.

As I reached the house, Alice and Larry drove up the hill. I was relieved to see them back. I guess I was beginning to be a coward. I feared something born of imagination. I feared violent death and I smelled it in every breath of perfumed air.

A MONTH passed after Jean was buried. Alice kept the house open and did a fine, brave job of making the place alive and pleasant. It just didn't work. Larry suggested that he and I move into my apartment in Detroit. He couldn't go on living with Jean's memories. I could see it in his face as it gradually became gaunt and unhappy. I noticed it in his work. His hand, usually so firm and fine where our engineering sketches were concerned, faltered and left wavery lines.

We left Alice at Hilltop House, though it hurt us both to do it. She wouldn't go with us, and I suspected that she might have someone whom she had never told us about, who wouldn't want her to leave. Alice's personal life was a mystery to me for I had been away from Hilltop so long. She was as lovely as Jean, but in a cooler, more matter-of-fact sense. I assumed that someday she planned to marry, and I figured that Hilltop might hold attractions that she didn't care to leave.

The apartment was a mess. I had left it in a hurry. I called the manager and a maid came in to clean up. I showed Larry his room and we unpacked.

The odor of death came to the apartment. It followed us from Hilltop, three hundred miles to the north, and settled thickly in the four spacious rooms of my private domain.

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It was close to eleven in the evening. We had worked late over the plan for a new rocket-projectile device which United Aircraft wanted installed in their newest passenger planes. At last Larry arose and dropped his drawing pencil.

"That's enough," he said. There was a tired look on his face that told me he couldn't keep his mind on those straight pencil lines. "Let's have a drink."

I went to the kitchen, found a bottle of soda and delved into the folding bar for a bottle of whiskey. Ironically, the stuff was a popular brand with four red roses engraved on the label.

My hand shook as I poured the shot glasses level with the amber fluid. I passed one to Larry. He lifted it to his lips.

"To Jean," he said, and emptied the glass with an eager gulp.

I could have sworn at him for that. No one should drink a toast to Jean now. Her name should never be mentioned. Her memory was sacred. I lifted the glass. As it came close, I couldn't smell the fumes of the alcohol. I could only smell the heady richness of roses. It was as though the glass contained perfume.

I put the glass down slowly.

"I—don't think I'll drink," I said. "Damned headache."

I put my hand to my forehead.

To my amazement, Larry seemed angry.

"I was toasting Jean," he said grimly.

"I'm sick," I said a little shortly. "I think I'll turn in."

I turned to feel his hand on my arm, pulling me back. I pivoted and faced him. His eyes were blazing. His face was a deep, angry red.

"God damn you," he said sharply. "I toasted Jean. Do you understand that? Don't think I didn't know you loved her. It made her prouder than hell—having both of us in love with her. *You're going to drink to her memory.*"

I HAD never seen Larry act like that. Something had stirred him deeply. Anger—fear—nervousness? I don't know what. I didn't want to fight with Larry. I couldn't work without him. I took the glass and drained it hurriedly, choking as it went down, drinking not whiskey, but sweet, aromatic perfume.

Larry sank back into his chair. He still held his empty glass in his right hand. It dropped on the floor and rolled over and over on the rug.

"I'm sorry, Mark," he said. His voice was calm now, and detached. "I'm a fool. Guess my nerves are on edge. I shouldn't have. . . ."

"That's okay," I said. "It was a blow. It's pretty tough. Sure, we both know how I felt about Jean. I've never intruded, Larry. I never tried to take her from you. You were the best man."

He shook his head slowly from side to side.

"I wonder," he said softly. "I wonder. . . ."

I stared at him, wanting him to explain, wanting him to go on. He didn't. He just sat there, staring straight ahead of him as though lost in thought.

The room was suddenly full of the death perfume again. The scent of roses. The scent of Jean, as though she were here, one of the three who had fought together and worried together, and one of the partnership that had given birth to success, life—and finally dissolved itself into death.

I went into my room slowly, leaving Larry alone. I couldn't sleep that night. Death hung over my bed, making it hard to breathe. I wanted to

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hold my hand over my nostrils, shutting out the odor. I didn't dare. I had to breathe hard to get enough oxygen. It was as though *I* was lying in that coffin instead of Jean, and the roses were piled in great profusion around and over my bed. I awoke after an hour or two and opened the windows. The fresh air rushed in, mixed with the odor, and was lost in it. The room was no better.

I dressed and went out. Larry was asleep in his chair, breathing heavily, deep lines of suffering written on his forehead. I pitied Larry from the bottom of my heart.

I went down to the street and walked for God knows how long, but the fragrance of Jean and the odor of death followed me, seeping even into the greasy hamburger joint where I stopped toward morning to fall asleep finally over a cup of coffee.

I dreamed that Jean was following me, trying to wrap me in a shroud and thus punish me for some mysterious crime that I had unwittingly perpetrated. I couldn't escape the dream until someone shook me and helped me stumble to my feet.

"It's nine o'clock, Bud. You better get out for some fresh air. You better go home."

I mumbled thanks to the apron covered boy who helped me into the street. I was drunk. Drunk with the spell of death. Unable to escape the dream.

Why would Jean wish to kill me?

I didn't know. I didn't know anything then. I tried to escape her—and the musky odor of death held me tightly.

I was going mad.

ON SATURDAY afternoon, Larry and I went up to Hilltop House to see Alice. It had been eight weeks since that day I first smelled the sickishly sweet odor of death. Two months since I wandered about the empty house, pursued by Jean's memory—perhaps by more than memory. Perhaps by death itself.

Alice had changed little. The living room no longer smelled of death. The house was freshly cleaned and bright with sunshine. Alice met us at the door. She kissed us both in the sisterly manner we had been accustomed to in years past.

"I'm so darned glad you came up that I could cry," she said.

I marvelled at the bright smile, the way she hurried to prepare us a meal, as though nothing had happened. Then I remembered that even in two months we heal some, if the wound has not been kept open.

I was the only one who had continued to feel the open wound. Even Larry, who had always acted so devoted to his wife, had changed since she died. He never mentioned her, and was willing, even anxious to return to Hilltop after our business was taken care of.

We had lunch and never once was Jean's name mentioned. I was relieved, for the roses had not troubled me since we arrived. I associated them so closely with this place that I was terrified at the idea of facing another day or night where the odor could reach me.

After lunch, I wandered down to the road. I carefully avoided the bridle path, and ended up at the far side of the farm, near the riding stable where Prince was kept.

I had always liked the horse. Now, knowing that he had caused Jean's death, the thought of seeing him was sickening. Nevertheless, Charlie Barnett, Prince's owner, was training the horse in the white fenced ring near the stable. I wandered over and leaned on

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the fence.

"Hello, Charlie."

Barnett was a big, good natured man with a ready grin and a rolling walk that reminded you of a sailor off his ship. He climbed off Prince's back and ambled over, leading Prince behind him.

"Haven't seen you for quite a spell, Mr. Jenning," he said. I accepted his big hand. After I released it, the grin faded from his face.

"Say, I didn't get a chance to tell you how sorry I was about Mrs. Fargo. You and her was pretty good friends. I guess Prince was a bad actor that day."

I didn't want to talk about it.

"Nothing you could do, Charlie," I said.

He shook his head.

"Just the same," he said, "Prince ain't usually so flighty. Seems to me like Mr. Fargo shoulda seen that car coming."

"Mr. Fargo?"

I thought that Jean had been riding alone.

"Yeah," Charlie said. "Didn't you know Mr. and Mrs. Fargo was riding together?"

"No," I said slowly, "I didn't. Just what *did* happen? I thought. . . ."

Barnett tied Prince's reins to the fence and climbed up beside me.

"Mr. Fargo was pretty worked up over it when he brought the horses in," he said. "It seems Jean—that is—Mrs. Fargo, was riding ahead. She was half-way cross the state highway when a car flashed by her. She didn't see it. Prince shied and threw her into the ditch. Her neck. . . ."

I interrupted him hurriedly.

"You said you thought Mr. Fargo . . . ?"

"That's what I said," he admitted, "Mr. Fargo was a good twenty yards behind her. He musta seen the car."

"If Larry had had time to warn Jean, he'd have done it," I said.

Barnett nodded.

"Yeah, suppose you're right." He slid to the ground. "Just the same, I don't understand it, Prince shying like that. He's a pretty good horse."

FOR the first time, doubt started to gnaw at my mind. I was insane to suspect anything but the finest from Larry. Still, he had acted oddly this month. I remembered that night when he grew angry because I refused to drink the toast to Jean.

Back at the house, I interrupted Larry and Alice in the living room. Larry went down to tend the furnace and Alice cornered me. She must have been quarreling with Larry, because her face was pale and her lips were drawn and white across her teeth.

"Mark," she said, and I sensed pent-up emotion inside her. "Mark, we've got to do something about Larry. He's—not acting decently."

I was startled, and not too sure just what she meant.

"I don't get it," I said. "At noon everything was all right. Larry isn't making passes at you?"

Her head moved ever so slightly, as though she was afraid to say it aloud.

White hot anger flooded my brain. At that moment—that instant that we faced each other, one frightened of what could happen, the other damning his best friend for letting it happen—I realized that Alice Kern needed me more than anyone in the world. Had needed me and had waited for years for me to understand.

"Alice," I said. It had taken her own crisis to awaken me—to make me feel real emotion, "Larry—killed Jean, didn't he? He killed her so that he could have you."

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Tears started in her eyes and made wet trails down her cheeks. She leaned forward and was in my arms. I didn't kiss her then. I just held her tightly.

"Larry did kill Jean, didn't he?"

Her voice was tiny, muffled by my shoulder.

"He—could have saved her."

Why did death follow me? I knew it was there, threatening me every instant, getting ready to strike when and where it got ready. I grew to hate roses with more intensity than I thought it possible to hate anything. I smelled them everywhere we went. We stayed close together that week. Larry suspected that I knew, and he was determined to keep all three of us together now. Determined to share everything with us and keep Alice from being alone with me.

We tried riding, but that was no good. We played cards, and Jean wasn't there for a fourth partner.

It wasn't a solution we were seeking. It was escape.

If I had had the nerve that week, I would have asked both Alice and Larry if they smelled death as I did. If, during every waking hour, the warm, hot-house odor of roses hovered near them.

I didn't have the nerve, I suspect that I came very close to going mad.

ON FRIDAY night, it happened. I walked for hours, trying to let the fresh wind blow away the death smell. I came into the house and there was a light burning in the kitchen.

I thought of going upstairs. I was lonely, and sought company. I went down the hall toward the light. I stepped into the kitchen to see Alice struggling in Larry's arms. She cried out as I entered.

"Mark, please—help me."

It was a terror stricken cry, and I sprang toward Larry, grasping his neck and pulling him away from her. To my surprise, he put up no struggle. He stood there, arms at his sides, glaring at us both with hot angry eyes.

"Oh," he said slowly, "so that's how it is?"

"That's how it is," I said. "I have every right to care for Alice, and to love her. You should have a little more consideration for Jean's memory."

He turned and stalked angrily out of the room. I turned to Alice.

"I'm sorry I went out," I said. "I should have known he'd try it again."

She came to me then, and I kissed her. I was surprised at the coolness of her lips.

We sat in the library, Alice on a hassock before the fire, her slim legs drawn up under her, I in Larry's smoking chair.

We were discussing our plan for escape.

Escape?

Yes, it was that for both of us. I hoped to leave behind forever the dread odor that stalked me. Alice wanted to go where she would never see Larry Fargo again. We would do nothing about Larry. If, as Alice and I thought, he had deliberately let Jean go to her death, we could never hope to prove it. I wasn't sure I wanted to.

"Larry tried to make love to me many times," Alice said. Every word hurt her. It was a struggle for her to go on. "The morning Jean and he went out for a ride, he kissed me. He said that if things worked out his way, we could be married."

She stared at me earnestly.

"Mark, I hated him. He sought me behind Jean's back, and I couldn't tell Jean. I never encouraged him. I hoped it would work out all right."

She started to cry.

"You mustn't blame yourself," I said

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quietly. "Jean wouldn't blame you. I'll sell my share of the plant to Larry. We'll go west, to California. Sparton Aircraft has been after me for some time."

She dried her tears. She looked up.

"You're a grand person, Mark. You know, I can understand now what Jean saw in you."

I felt something stirring deep inside of me. Something that stabbed at my heart.

"Saw—in me?"

"Why yes," she said, "Of course you knew that Jean was in love with you—to the end."

"No," I said. I felt panicky. "No, not Jean. She turned me down. She loved Larry."

I was sure that she didn't mean to be cruel. All the bitterness was draining from her heart. This was a time for confessions.

"She loved you," she said, as though to end the argument. "She thought she cared for Larry when they were married. I caught her crying once, with your picture in her lap. Larry played around with other women. He mentioned you, and what a fine guy you were, whenever he wanted to hurt her. Mark, Jean wouldn't admit it, but she'd have given up a dozen Larry's for one word of love from you."

We were torturing each other. Alice and I are in love, I kept telling myself.

Alice and I are in love.

"We're going away," I said. "You're not to mention Jean or Larry again after tonight. We're going to be happy without memories."

It had to be that way.

I LAY alone in the dark room, the moon sending pale shafts of silver through the open window. The air was cool and fresh, but I couldn't sleep. I kept hearing Alice's words over and over.

"Jean would have given a dozen Larry's for you—she loved you—she would have given a dozen—she loved. . . ."

I sat up in bed. Something had disturbed me. Something beside my memory of words—Alice's words.

Death was in the house. It stole in from the garden. The scent of roses was faint in the air at first, then heavy—making it hard to breathe. I felt sure tonight that I was going mad. One more night of this and I'd become a raving maniac.

I got up and pulled on a robe.

I went out into the hall and thought I heard voices drifting up faintly from below.

Cautiously I walked along the hall toward the head of the stairs. A light burned in the library.

Larry, I thought, sitting up late. Larry, troubled by his conscience. But that would not explain the voices. Larry wouldn't talk to himself.

Death was all around me now. Sweet, drug filled death, drawing me down the stairs.

I heard Alice's voice.

"Larry, you're a fool."

It was a gentle, teasing voice. I stopped short, filled suddenly with grave misgivings. I had lost something somewhere along this strange trail. Lost a clue—a tiny thread of thought that changed everything. Changed my life.

Larry was talking. It was a spoiled, pampered Larry that I was listening to.

"But you were making love to Jenning. I saw you."

"Not *love,* Larry." I hated Alice then, for her voice was filled with strange emotion. I knew that they were very close, probably in each other's arms. "We're on the spot, Larry darling. Mark suspects. He knows that you watched Jean die, and that you

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could have prevented it."

Larry swore loudly.

"Damn you. I warned you not to talk that way."

"And why shouldn't I? Haven't we been in love for years? Didn't you promise me that when the time came, Jean wouldn't stand in our way?"

Silence, then Larry's voice admitted everything.

"Well, maybe, but *I* didn't touch her. The car was coming fast. I figured she wouldn't see it in time. I didn't actually murder her."

"As if it mattered," Alice said. "Jean wasn't happy. She's better where she is. As for Mark?"

I leaned forward, listening intently.

"I'll take care of him," Larry said. I heard the sound of movement as though he was standing up. "This is as good a time as any."

Alice laughed. It was a cold murderous laugh.

"I admire you, Larry Fargo. You're ice cold. You're like Jean's beloved roses, nice to look at, but covered with thorns."

IT SEEMED to me at that moment as though I heard a gentle sigh close to my ear. I heard Larry come out of the libary and knew he would be in the hall shortly, coming up to murder me.

Then the oppressive odor of roses drifted away from me and I stood there, alone and with the clear night air touching my nostrils.

I backed up the stairs slowly, silently.

I heard Larry's footsteps, then Alice's, as she came to the door of the library and stood there, watching him walk toward the stairs. It was an open stairway, and my eyes were now accustomed to the half light from the library. I could see them both quite clearly.

I wasn't going to run. I intended to fight.

Larry reached the bottom of the stairs. He took one step upward, then fell back, a look of intense fear on his face.

His lips curled away from his teeth, and I could see only his face, pale and terror stricken, staring up at me.

No, Larry wasn't looking at me, for he turned and started to run. Halfway across the hall he fell, as though something had hit him from behind. He lay there on his face, arms and legs stretched wide apart, and never moved again.

I heard Alice scream and knew that she was running from the house. I made no move to call her back or attempt to follow her.

At last I knew the mystery of the odor of death. Death had hovered near me, but *I* was not death's victim. Alice had been right. Jean *had* loved me. I knew now.

I knew it as I stood on the stairs looking down at Larry Fargo's still, outstretched corpse. I was sure of it when the odor of roses—*Jean's roses,* enveloped me tenderly once more.

This time I didn't fear the scent. I embraced it, and I knew as surely as I knew that Larry was dead, that Jean's lips brushed my cheek softly, gently, before the odor was gone again, and I stood alone in a house of death.

IT WAS ironic. Perhaps it was fate, but I think not. Alice Kern died on the highway. Died near the spot where Jean Kern was thrown from Prince's back. Alice was rushing blindly away from the house, insane with fright when the car hit her. The driver said he saw no one on the road, and the next moment she was there, crushed and bleeding, beneath his wheels.

I explained it all to the Sheriff at

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Hilltop. Larry had died of heart failure and while I was trying to revive him just before his death, Alice had gone for a doctor. The result was quite obvious. No one questioned me.

My doctor offered an interesting sidelight on the problem, sometime later.

"Some people seem to have the power of detecting odors that ordinary nostrils ignore," he said. "Men have been known to avoid losing their lives, because they *smelled* death in time and rushed away from it, panic stricken. You are fortunate, if you were ever so warned, that you acted in time to save yourself."

Fortunate? Yes, lucky that I was beckoned from my bed that night and led to the spot where my death sentence was spoken. I might have been forced to murder Larry Fargo and protect Alice. Protect one murderer and become the husband of another who was even more treacherous.

It's all over now. My doctor was right. I do have a keen sense of smell, if you can classify it as that. I do not fear the perfume of roses now. I welcome death when it comes drifting softly into my room at night. I embrace the scent of Jean's roses, and fancy that when I detect their heady aroma in the night, she is close to me, seeking my embrace, my love.

I often close my eyes and feel her lips against mine.

A vivid imagination, you say? I'm not sure that it is. I sincerely believe that her love for me manifests itself by these nocturnal visits. I think that as I write these words, she is close. The window is open and I can look out on her garden and see the rose bushes that she planted, glistening with dew and turned to silver by the moonlight.

I'm not lonely at Hilltop House. Even now I feel Jean's lips, as I did that night, pressed lightly against my cheek.

THE END.

ANIMAL TEAMWORK

By R. CLAYTON

THAT the "share and share alike" theory has been one of the irrefutable laws of the animal kingdom is something human beings may not like to comfortably acknowledge. But some animals seem to have learned much quicker than their human brothers that working together for a common cause pays off.

Naturalists have seen a hungry monkey in the jungle forego food until it had called its fellows to share in the discovery. Gregarious animals such as pigs often rely on teamwork in hunting or to protect themselves from foes. Wild hunting dogs of Africa pursue small antelopes in relays, tired members of the pack dropping behind while fresh contingents take up the chase. When a herd of musk ox is attacked by wolves, the males form a ring, shoulder to shoulder, all their heads facing outward and lowered so that a wall of bristling horns is presented to the attackers. The females and young are placed inside the ring.

Sometimes animals team up to benefit an entire community. Cherry Keaton, the English naturalist, who spent a year on an island in the Indian Ocean that is a breeding place of penguins, records an astonishing incident of this kind. Every morning the penguins paraded down to the sea for a swim, always following the paths that they had made. These paths often crossed areas of level, bare earth, which became slippery fields of slime when it rained—and the penguins found it impossible to walk upright on such a surface. So gangs of the birds pecked at the ground, scoring it with their beaks into a series of sharp ridges like a gridiron. They kept at this hard labor for hours, until the path was transformed into an evenly ridged thoroughfare along which all the penguins of the community could pass without danger of slipping. Thousands of them used these paths every day, and as soon as the ridges became broken down, gangs would get busy at repair work.

This deliberate teamwork, voluntary service to the whole community, seems to require not only forethought but the transference of ideas by speech or by extra sensory perception. Can it be said that animals are more successful at this idea of cooperation for the common good than we "intelligent" human beings?

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PRINCESS of the SEA

by DON WILCOX

(Continued from page 45)

CHAPTER XVII

BEFORE Stupe Smith's startled eyes, under a shaft of sunlight, the apparition appeared, as clear cut as any statue. The real thing! Alive, moving, splashing through the water!

On the instant Stupe forgot to swim. He stared through the opening in the mist, he held his breath, he felt his muscles go tense with excitement. The girl—the girl of the sea—the weird beautiful creature who lived in the oceans of Venus! This was the prize he had come to find.

"Like a ghost coming to life!" he gasped, voiceless.

His eyes had been turned in exactly the right direction to catch this view when the path broke through the mist, for the splash of hoofs in the water had become audible as soon as the drone of the plane, lost in the gray, had faded in the distance.

"I knew it! I knew it!" He was much too excited to know what he was saying. The fact was, only a few minutes earlier he had almost convinced himself that his brain had gone bleary with hallucinations. The mist. The long swim. The recent spell of hunger. The dismal weather. The loneliness and dizziness of wandering through this strange land.

The misty clouds, pressing down upon the waters, were about to shut off his view again, and so he called, loud, huskily.

"Hellooooo!"

The girl was no more than fifty yards distant. The sun had for a moment highlighted the golden brown of her flowing hair and etched her shoulders with lines of pink. The bright green of her abbreviated garments shone with the added glitter of gems that matched the sparks of sunlight from the splashing waters.

"Hellooooo!"

Stupe's muscles tightened. The girl hadn't turned. At least not enough to see him. Yet she must have heard. The white stallion she was riding had certainly caught his voice, for that handsome fellow turned his classic white head far enough that Stupe caught the flash of his eye and the flare of his pink nostril.

Now they were turning, horse and rider, the hoofs thrashing in the water, sinking not more than a foot deep. As the mist closed in, Stupe saw them from a full side view, poised with such strength and grace as would have delighted any sculptor.

"Helloooo!"

At last Stupe's call met with some response. The white stallion turned swiftly, and Stupe thought he could hear the swish of the girl's flowing jeweled skirt. She was turning to face him. Her head high, her fearless face lighted with an expression that seemed to ask the question, Why are you following me? What is your game? What do you want with me?

Then, as for a moment the mist thinned, he saw in the sharpness of her eyes a look of recognition. As if to say, Of course, it's *you*. I should have known.

SHE slapped her mount on the neck and the big white fellow went plunging down into the sea. The waves swallowed them up, horse and rider. A spray of diamonds, a flash of pink shoulders, and the gray mist lingered as a retained image in Stupe's eyes. And one thing more. The girl's upraised arm.

At the very instant of disappearing, she had *waved*.

For many minutes, Stupe simply swam. Not in any particular direction. He was simply swimming to give his thoughts a chance to clear.

The gray waters were beginning to sap

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his strength slowly. The ocean's temperature was a few degrees too warm. Now the mists gathered into bunchy little clouds with pink edges, and all around there were straight shafts of sunlight beaming down through the steamy atmosphere. No shore appeared however, though Stupe was continually searching, more or less unconsciously, for some stopping place.

He kept wondering vaguely, what would happen if a two-ton snail would crawl off the shore into the water. Would it float, a raft of red gelatin, or would it sink and become fish food?

And what of the fish in this sea? Might there be any Venus water life comparable to earth's sharks?

He was still drawing the tiny raft, and for this reason felt that he was making slow progress, and again he complained mentally of the warmth of the water.

"It wouldn't do to tire out," he thought. And then, *"She waved at me."* And again his heartbeat quickened.

Everything that passed through his mind was light and inconsequential, it seemed, compared to that one dominating fact. She had waved at him.

She had waved and plunged into the sea. And now where was she?

Sometimes he thought he could detect paths of luminous dream dust on the surface. But whenever he swam toward them they thinned into nothingness. He hooked an elbow over his tiny raft and rested. Resting, he ate a few bites of the precious store of food he had brought.

"In all this sea, I could never find her again," he said to himself. "I can't hope to pursue her. This is *her* world. A man would have to have a submarine. And even then I doubt—"

But there was that one consoling mental image of a girl's hand waving, her pink fingers spreading slightly as they slipped into the water.

"The battle is half won," he thought. "To know that she's here, in flesh and blood—to know that it's no myth—that she's the real McCoy—"

Stupe drew a deep breath, and his nickname, Stupendous flashed through his mind to make him smile. The party would drink to this occasion when he told them—

"If I can make her be friends with me—that's the thing. The only thing. Nobody could ever plough down through those waves and capture her. But if she'll make friends—"

Suddenly his throat was dry so that it was hard to gulp his food. What did such things mean? Was he, the honest and honorable Stupendous Smith, planning to trick this girl into a *friendship* so that he could *capture* her?

"Don't be having a conscience at a time like this." He spoke aloud. But his words sounded too weak against the shrill thin cries of that still small voice within him. So he repeated his words, shouting them in a heavy voice.

"Don't be having a conscience at a time like this."

A voice within a few feet of him spoke, clear and bell-like, with a strange accent.

"What is a conscience?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE girl and her white charger had risen out of the depths as silently and treacherously as any submarine, Stupe thought.

"Huh?" he stumbled for words. "Huh—er—*well!* What a funny party we are. Three heads poking out of the water, and not an island in sight."

"What is a conscience?"

The girl's lips were touched with a faint smile. The curiosity of her wide eyes was upon him, pressing him for an answer.

"Where on earth did you learn to speak English?" he asked.

"Where do you learn to talk?" she returned. Do you learn to talk from the *wingmen?"*

So that was it. The wingmen. She had listened to them using the language they had stolen from earth men. She had stolen it too.

But she knew other languages. She came a little closer, jabbering the musical words that might have been the original wingman tongue. He was at a loss to understand. He began to laugh.

"Cease firing, please. Stop until I catch

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my breath, my fairy princess. What *are* you saying?"

"*Fairy princess?*" she repeated. "Am I a *fairy princess?*" The sound of the words fascinated her. She was quick, all right. And she was thoroughly enjoying herself too, Stupe decided. Watching him with eyes that had begun to twinkle, she drew herself to the stallion's neck, pressing her head sidewise against the white mane. "What is *fairy princess?*"

"You're the princess of the sea, lady," said Stupe. "I don't know how you came to be. In fact, I don't know anything about you—least of all how you and your horse can ride down into the depths of the ocean and up again without—"

But the girl had interrupted with more rapidfire wingman talk, and Stupe had no choice but to stand by in silence and awe. He was treading water leisurely, with one hand on the raft. He hoped that her mysterious words had something to do with an island.

"Princess, if you could put that in English—"

"I was asking you again, like I asked you before—*what is a conscience?*"

"Oh, that." Stupe lifted his eyebrows and made a wry face. There was that guilty feeling again. But now that he was talking with her on a friendly basis, it seemed less serious. He laughed at himself. "Listen carefully, Princess, and I'll try to explain."

"I LISTEN," she said. She was daringly beautiful, smiling that way. Much too attractive, Stupe thought. Those fierce bright eyes of the stallion were warning him, it seemed, against gazing at her too intently. That beast looked as if he would go charging off at the slightest excuse.

"All right," said Stupe. "A conscience is—well, suppose someone starts out to capture someone else—to make someone a prisoner—"

"*Why?*"

"Because—er—because a prisoner is needed."

"Yes, a *prisoner* is *needed.*" The girl nodded. "That is exactly it. I understand. But the *conscience?*"

"Then someone decided to be friends with the person who was about to be the prisoner."

"Being friends—yes," she was watching him anxiously, her smile fading. "*You know?*"

"Wanting to be friends, someone *can't* make someone a prisoner," Stupe said. And then he thought, how dreadful a thing to say. He was about to betray his own cause.

"And that is conscience?" she asked.

"That's it," he said weakly. "It's an awful thing to have."

"Yes," she nodded eagerly, and her pretty mouth became much too serious over it all. "To have conscience makes someone forget someone's duty."

"Say, you're quick, all right."

"You are the quick one," she said. "How did you *know?*"

"Know what?" Stupe mumbled.

"Know that I needed a prisoner to take back to my nation?"

"You—you, Princess?"

"But when I found you asleep in your cave—" she began to smile faintly, not looking at him now, but rubbing her fingers over the stallion's mane absently—"I decided I would not make you a prisoner, because I do not want to see you killed so soon. Even if my nation needs a prisoner, I decide to let you sleep—"

Stupe's throat tightened. The quick little glances from her friendly eyes might have warned him. But those strange words were like knifeblades."

"So I touch your eyelids with the dust of peace, and you sleep," she said, "and I go back to my nation and say I do not yet find a prisoner to be killed."

"Oh," Stupe murmured, the breath going out of him.

THE horse tossed his fine head impatiently. His trim legs, visible in the clear water, began to stamp and paw with eagerness. The Princess of the Sea, if such she was, knew the meanings of his every motion. Her fingertips played lightly over the graceful curve of his neck.

"Marble Boy wants to take me home," she said. "I think he would like to take

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you, also."

Stupe involuntarily backed away. "Where—which way do I swim to find the shore?"

She was laughing at his evasion. Did she detect his wariness? Did she consider him a coward? The shore? She gave a light gesture. The clouds were about to lift, and the shore would appear not far distant.

"I shall find another prisoner," she said. The disappointment in her manner was unmistakable. "My nation would have liked you. It is a great occasion. It would make them happy to have a prisoner like you. But I think you would not like to die. *Would you?"*

"Frankly, no," said Stupe. "I came here on a purpose of my own."

"Your own—yes?"

"Correction," said Stupe. "I'm on a mission for a millionaire."

Her questioning look ended with a shrug. *"Missions* and *millionaires* I do not understand. But I do understand *conscience,* and that is why, one day in your cave, I did not make you prisoner. But I drew the circles on your map where you had marked my home.

"Your home—those circles?"

"Would you come as a friend," the Princess asked. "Do you also have a conscience?"

She did not tarry for an answer. Her mount, notified by some subtle signal, charged up and away, then down beneath the surface.

CHAPTER XIX

THE shore became visible through the lifting clouds. Stupe gave a low whistle. Somehow he had managed to swim several miles out to sea. The nearest promontory was the tenth finger jutting southward from the line of blue mountains that formed the northern skyline.

Suddenly he realized that fatigue was closing in on him. Fortunately there was a resting place a little further out. Another half mile of swimming . . .

The circle of light shone up out of the blue. He was crossing a rim of light—the curved line that appeared as a part of a one hundred yard circle.

The light was a band of red, shining up through the water from some hidden source.

Soon he was crossing an orange band of a second concentric circle. The bright colored waves danced in his eyes.

The innermost circle, of brilliant yellow, was so intense that he closed his eyes while swimming over. This was what he had seen from the plane, mistaking it for some natural phenomenon of reflection.

"There must be some sort of power plant down there," he decided.

Obviously perfect curves were a part of some man-made device beneath the surface of the sea. The warmth flooded upward into his water-soaked body.

His destination was now revealed to be a little circular platform about three feet above the surface. It appeared to be made of some glass-like substance. A few minutes later he was clambering up on it and dragging his raftload of equipment after him.

"Whew!"

The plastic surface was warm to his tired body. After dressing himself and eating a little, he lay down under the pleasant sunshine and rested.

He had no intention of sleeping. There was far too much to think about.

"Her home," he murmured. "I wonder what it's like."

Lying on his stomach, he propped his elbows on the edge of the plastic platform and peered down into the waters. A soft, purplish illumination filled the depths.

His platform was like a twenty-foot table, supported by a central stem perhaps ten feet in diameter, which could be seen through the flat surface.

Stupe wondered if Mr. Vest had ever come this close to what was plainly the pinnacle of some under-sea chamber. Probably not, for the concentric circles of light had never been mentioned in any of the Wellington instructions.

S-s-s-swish!—

THE plastic platform barely vibrated—Stupe leaped to discover that it was

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changing shape. The stem which supported it from some under-water base was rising through it like a piston through a cylinder.

The hydraulic action, if such it was, carried the stem upward to a height of twelve or fifteen feet, and there it stopped.

"I'm standing on the rim of a big glass hat," Stupe observed. Then he noticed something that quickened his pulse. "Oh-oh—a door!"

The inner cylinder that had risen was marked by a seven-foot door. The crystal tower contained nothing, but he could see that steps led downward into some dark depth.

"No," Stupe said aloud. "No, I won't."

He was answering himself before he dared ask the question—should he try to open the door and see where the steps led?

"No—not yet. Maybe later—after I get word to Hefty."

Nevertheless, he did try the door to see if it would open.

It swung inward at his touch. He peered in.

"No," he repeated. The risk was too great. Hefty and twelve other persons would depend upon him to effect a capture when the time was right. They would back him to the limit—he hoped. It would be foolhardy for him to squander himself on an unnecessary risk. This doorway might be a trap. He'd better go slowly until he knew.

He was about to close the door when he heard footsteps on the stairs.

Swish—swish—swish.

The slow, heavy steps of a tired man or woman—barefooted? A moment later, accompanied by much puffing and panting, an old man came into view, rounding the last curve of the spiral glass stairs.

Stupe started to shrink back out of sight, though this was quite impossible, for his only retreat was around the transparent wall of the cylindrical projection.

The old man spied him and gave a squawk of alarm.

"Yeezak! Yeezak!"

Swick—swick—swick!—the quickened footsteps beat a hard retreat down into the spiral passage, and Stupe was left to his guesses as to what it all meant.

"Now, what bit him?" Stupe said aloud. "Did I scare him out of his forenoon dip? Or was he coming up for a sunbath? I wonder who he is? The Princess' grandfather, maybe? No family resemblance. I'll bet he's the undersea janitor."

Stupe tried to remember how the old fellow was dressed. Ornamented brown and green trunks and a pair of jeweled wristbands was all that he recalled. The brevity of the costume argued that the old fellow had intended to swim or sunbathe.

"Why should he have been scared of me, I wonder . . . Or was he?" A fearful thought dawned upon Stupe. "No, not scared. He saw me as an opportunity. His nation needs a prisoner. They need someone to kill . . . Hm-m. If that's it, he'll be back shortly—he or his grandsons."

It was a logical line of reasoning, Stupe decided a few moments later. For suddenly a host of footsteps could be heard pattering up the spiral ascent, and they sounded as if they meant business.

CHAPTER XX

"WATCH it, there, Madam Stevens!" Dick Bracket said for the twenty-fifth time.

The plane had covered the required mileage but was wasting some motion trying to pick an opening among the clouds for a view of the Venus soil beneath.

"I'll get you down, Brother Bracket," Thelma retorted. "Just keep your Sunday shirt on."

"There, to your left," Hefty said. "See those wide open spaces?"

It was too foggy to be sure that open spaces weren't mountains in disguise.

"Have the thirteen fingers been crossed?" Dick Bracket asked.

"Just keep your own fingers crossed," said Thelma. "That's all the crossing you have to do."

Hefty suppressed a chuckle. Dick's suspicious eye hadn't relaxed. He hadn't slept. All his pep talks hadn't given him any real confidence in his three compan-

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ions. He must have known that if he had turned his back Hefty would start a campaign of his own.

The Fiddle brothers, however, had cooperated like a pair of trained seals, taking on a glow of big-shot importance.

Now through a break in the clouds they looked down a patch of yellow beach land dotted with many giant snails.

"If that's the shoulder," one of the Fiddle brothers commented, "it's broken out with a rash."

"Measles," said his brother.

It was their first view of the two-ton snails and from overhead they supposed them to be some immense flowers or plants.

"All I know is, they weren't here before," said Jake Fiddle. "I figure we've misread the map."

"This is the shoulder," said Dick.

"Things happen fast in Venus," said Jake.

"They're going to happen faster," said Dick. He had his own meaning. This land, in his mind, was already being dotted with buildings bearing the name of J. J. Wellington, and he knew that he would occupy the palatial headquarters. He hoped there would be a pink marble entrance and balcony with a gold rail.

THEY threaded their way down through the dispersing clouds, curious to know whether they could pick a landing spot among those strange lumps of gleaming red. Touching the surface, they cut a perilous path, barely dodging three snails and finally riding over a fourth with sad results. It was like plowing into a pile of glue. The plane skidded on its nose and stopped with its tail in the air. A mass of red snail flesh was clinging to its underbelly.

"Of all the stupid piloting!" Dick barked. "Did you have to do that?"

"I picked a clear path," Thelma retorted. "That darned thing moved."

"It moved after you hit it," Dick growled, "in all directions."

They climbed out and surveyed their mess. It looked like jelly, Hefty thought. He tasted it and smacked his lips. "Yummy. Must be a synthetic food factory somewhere around."

He took another bite. Dick watched him enviously. The Fiddle brothers and Thelma had begun to scrape the mess away from the landing gear. They were watching the other blobs of red gelatine dotted around the sand. The things *were* moving.

"They're some kind of animals," Thelma declared.

By this time Dick had tried a mouthful of the deep flavored goo. He looked around in alarm.

"Animals?" The idea of eating raw flesh didn't appeal to him. He walked around the plane, holding his stomach. A little privacy would have been greatly appreciated just then. But he was at once aware that the nearest shining mass of red was edging toward him, creeping—without feet, moving slowly under its biscuit-like shell.

"Animals!" he murmured weakly.

Three more of the strange snail-like creatures were seen to be moving. Dick imagined they were all coming toward him.

"Animals! Ooops!" His early breakfast departed from him, much to his relief. The momentary panic over being surrounded by moving creatures had shaken him. He tried to get a grip on himself. If he were to lead this expedition successfully, he had better not let this party know anything about his private shudders.

"Let's get that plane righted and taxi over to the cliff where we'll have some protection."

The Fiddle brothers gave him an interested look.

"You make it sound awful easy," said Jake. "Looks to me like we're hung up right here for a half a day."

They walked around their tail-up crate several times, muttering gloomily. Thelma was taking no blame for what had happened. She mounted a wing to survey the surrounding meadows and beach, through the low clouds, and she counted no less than a hundred and twenty snails.

"The wonder is," she said, "that I didn't smash into a dozen of them."

Hefty consoled her. "Nobody's complaining. Not even the snails."

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OBVIOUSLY the dumb creatures bore no grudges. They continued to ooze along on their criss-cross paths. When one of them moved too close to the plane Dick assigned Hefty the job of beating it off.

Hefty was eager to look for Stupe.

"We left him hiding in that hillside. Shall I go up and find him."

"He isn't there," said Dick.

"How do you know?"

"If he was he'd have come out as soon as he heard us land."

"He's got to be somewhere. He might have left a message in his cave." Hefty argued his point stoutly. "That's the way he and I operated in the Andes."

Dick Bracket didn't want to see Stupe Smith, that was plain. His authority over the present party of three was shaky enough without the interference of the man who was certain to obstruct his plan.

"We're gonna need all the help we can get, settin' this plane to rights," Jake Fiddle said. "We'd better find Stupe."

"Get busy, men," was Dick's retort.

"I'll beat the snails back," Hefty said, and he went to work.

Whish! Whish! Whish!

Handfuls of sand and gravel were all the weapon he needed to bluff the soggy dumb blobs of protoplasm. He would throw at them. After being struck two or three times they would stop and slowly fold into their shells. Then for several minutes they would remain crouched and motionless.

Hefty worked his way away from the plane with his own purpose. He moved toward the hillside, less than a mile away, where he hoped to find Stupe. When Dick Bracket called him to come back, he pretended not to hear.

Zing! Hefty jumped.

A bullet? It had glanced off the gravel, crossing a patch of wet sand to jump within two yards of his feet. He whirled. Dick Bracket was shooting!

"Come back here!" Dick yelled.

The fool! Just because he had two husky Fiddle boys on his side did he think he was entitled to kill anyone that crossed him up?

Hefty started back. He was seeing red. Just let him get his hands on that young murderer.

But the Fiddle brothers were already ahead of him. There was a swift play of fists. Hefty heard Dick cry out sharply, and saw him crouch and sink to his knees. Hefty ran to get in on the fight. He heard Bull Fiddle roar.

"We've had enough of this careless shootin'—d'ya understand?"

"Get some rope, Thelma," Jake Fiddle said.

The young fellow squealed like a pig under a fence. He would report this outrage to the captain. The captain would take care of them.

"If I was you, I wouldn't want to see the captain again," Jake Fiddle said. "All your big talk about startin' a new empire!"

"You'll see!" Dick vowed through his clenched teeth. "I'll make you eat dirt for this."

He began to curse, until Jake snapped a couple of warnings and finally boxed him across the mouth.

"What are you going to do with him, boys?" Thelma asked.

THEY bound him securely and would have tied him to a tree if there had been any trees. They preferred to place him far enough from the plane that he wouldn't hear their conversation. They couldn't leave him on the ground. A snail might glide over him and smother him.

"We could put him on top of a snail," Hefty suggested. "Those half dozen fellows haven't budged since I sandblasted them."

"Good idea," Thelma agreed. "We'll keep an eye on him."

Accordingly, they carried their erstwhile leader over to the nearest snail, which now appeared frozen within its cream-colored shell.

"He looks like a June bug on a biscuit," said Hefty, standing back to appraise the effect. "Dicky boy, the captain should see you now."

"Shut up," said Dick.

The Fiddle brothers looped the rope around the scallops of the shell, so that

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their prisoner wouldn't drop off in case the snail should decide to move.

"If he starts to take you a ride, holler," said Jake. "Are your wrists plenty tight? All right, don't do any more careless shootin'."

By noon they had succeeded in putting the plane to rights, and they taxied it across to the abrupt hillside that formed the west boundary of the flat shoulder.

"What about Dick?" Thelma asked.

"It's sure been a pleasure to work without him," Hefty said, "but we'd better not leave him."

The snail to which Dick was tied had begun to move again. Fortunately, it was creeping in the right direction.

"Free delivery service," Hefty observed. "When Wellington sets up his empire here, I wonder if I can't get the concession to organize these snails for trucking purposes."

Thelma laughed. "The Snail Pace Express. Phone in your orders early. Delivery next month—if it rains."

The Fiddle brothers joined the fun, wondering how many bottles of beer it would take to break a snail's back.

"Order your wine by Snail Express," Thelma said, imagining her words on an immense billboard. "Your bottled goods will be aged by the time it reaches you."

"The wingmen would most likely set up a line of their own and run us snail drivers out of business," said Hefty.

"I wouldn't trust a wingman to deliver any of my goods, bottled or otherwise," Jake said.

"I wouldn't trust a wingman, period," said Bull.

"Who knows," said Thelma, "The snails might learn some tricks too. How long before we'd find them folding up over their shells and eating the cargo off their own backs?"

Everyone looked back at the snail upon which Dick was tied, half expecting to see the boy being consumed. But nothing of the kind was taking place. The snail was creeping along toward them, so that within another half hour it might be expected to deliver its load to the cave door.

They stepped out of the plane and climbed the hillside to the little stone promontory which Hefty remembered.

"It's ten to one he's left a note," said Hefty, "even if he didn't expect anyone for a couple of days."

The cave was quite empty. They had expected to find at least a few items, such as food supplies.

"He must have moved, bag and baggage," Thelma said. "Maybe this turned out to be an unsafe spot."

Jake picked a feather off the floor.

"Wingmen?"

THE suggestion dealt a knockout blow to their conversation. They circled through the room again, combing the walls with a flashlight. Near the entrance they found evidence that something might have been hung over the doorway. But the something had been removed.

"Don't worry, Hefty," Thelma said.

"I ain't worrin'," Hefty lied. "Why should I worry? That guy knows how to take care of himself. He'll show up about dinner time. If he don't, it's cause we didn't bring Gypsy Brown along."

The four of them sat down in the cool shadowed room and discussed their plight.

"I wish we had brought Gypsy," Bull Fiddle said. "A good home cooked meal is just what I need."

But everyone remembered why Gypsy hadn't come along. This unofficial excursion had been organized at the point of Dick Bracket's pistol.

"Dick! Where is he? We left him joyriding on the back of a snail. We'd better—"

"Take it easy, Thelma," said Jake, peering out through the cave opening. "I can still see him, and he's still on his way over. Don't worry, we'll hear him squawk if anything goes wrong."

Perhaps it was the well-known principle of "meaningful forgetting" that accounted for what happened in the two hours that followed. Not that Hefty or any of his companions knew anything about the subtleties of human psychology. But if it is true that our memories like to slip on things we have found disagreeable, Dick Bracket stood a strong chance

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of being forgotten. In fact, the party felt such relief over having shelved him, after his ugly talk and rash violence, that they were quite happy to banish him temporarily from their thoughts.

A few minutes later the four of them were climbing the mountainside. After an hour's hike, they reached the crest of the thirteenth finger. They looked in all directions, hoping to see a column of campfire smoke in some direction.

All they saw were a few flocks of wingmen and a valley dotted with red snails.

Only as they descended to their plane did they remember that they had left Dick Bracket in somewhat perilous circumstances.

"Where is he? I don't see him."

Thelma stopped to rest her gaze upon the meadow. In the afternoon sunlight the crisscross snail trails could be discerned as thin brown ribbons.

"There's something going on over to the left." Hefty pointed to the deeper green of the gentle slope. "It looks like a bunch of men."

"If you had my sharp eyes," said Thelma, "you would see that it's a flock of wingmen. They're eating."

Some one had heard that wingmen habitually fed upon snail flesh, so this sight was not, in itself, so surprising.

The disturbing thing was that, as the party hiked down the steep grade, they saw not a single snail that contained a human being tied to its back.

"What's went with Dick?" Bull Fiddle growled.

"That's what we're all tryin' to make out, Dope," said his brother. "Looks to me like there's just one good answer." He gestured to the group of eight or ten wingmen feeding upon a gelatinous victim.

"I don't get it," said Bull.

"The wingmen were hungry," said Jake. "They've had themselves a feed."

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE platform far out in the waves Stupe Smith was literally jumping out of his clothes. The footsteps from the mysterious depths were sounding louder. It was a race against time.

In a matter of seconds Stupe had stripped down to his trunks, hung his clothes on the little raft and lowered it with all of his impediments, into the sea. He plunged in, caught the rope, and began swimming away as fast as his loaded raft would follow.

He listened for voices and a moment later they reached his ear. But they were not the angry voices he expected. Something had intervened—a very unexpected something—within the last few seconds, which put an entirely different outlook on everything.

It began when Stupe felt a sharp kick or thump against his ankle from some unseen force under the water.

Instantly it rose up into view—the white stallion bearing the glamorous princess of the sea. It couldn't have been an accident, Stupe knew. Not only was it timed perfectly, it was spaced perfectly. Horse and rider obscured him just before the voices sounded from the platform.

"Keep hidden," the princess said.

The stallion was half out of the water, casting a shadow over Stupe and his tiny raft.

"Thanks, friend," Stupe whispered, though the splash of waters around him may have swallowed his words.

The voices from the platform reminded him of the contented and polite chatterings of a cage full of birds enjoying a good meal. They may have hurried up the stairs to the surface expecting to find a foreigner—himself—awaiting capture. Instead, they found *her*—their princess.

Stupe began to understand, for there was a sprinkling of English in their talk.

"It is you . . . most noble . . . we were misled. . . . Old Man must be crazy. . . ."

The princess lifted an arm for silence.

"What an outburst! Control yourselves. Now, tell me quietly. Why have you come to the top of the world? Do you not see enough of Marble Boy when I parade through the Plaza?"

"We ascended the stairs because the Old Man called us," one of them answered. "He said we would find one of his lost brothers."

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Another, trying to apologize for their sudden and awkward appearance, said, "We hoped to find the prisoner we need."

STUPE wished that he dared peek at the men and women who belonged to these voices. Under the conditions he must not move. If they caught one glimpse of him the princess would be fatally embarrassed. She was lying to save his life, and plainly she was not used to lying.

"Pay no attention to the Old Man," she said, waving them away. "He has strange voices in his head."

They murmured unhappily over this rebuke. It seemed that the Old Man guarded the top of the stairway because he believed that some day one of his long-lost brothers would come. It was not like him to be calling false alarms.

"As a man grows old," the princess said, "he may not trust his own senses."

They retreated reluctantly, begging the Princess' pardon for displaying sudden excitement. Stupe could hear them pattering down the mysterious stairs.

At last the central shaft which had risen through the platform descended to its normal level, its flat top surface becoming one with the surface of the table. Again it was only a flat plate of plastic, a little artificial island within the vast ocean, bearing no sign of life."

"The door is gone," the girl said quietly. "You are safe now. You may return to the platform. They will not see you."

"Whew!" Stupe splashed up out of the water, knowing he had had a close call. "I don't believe they would like me, especially if they knew you were being my friend."

"Am I?" she said, a mischievous twinkle in the corner of her eyes.

The stallion bounded up out of the blue waters onto the plastic platform and knelt while the girl dismounted. She swung about so that the waters fell from her flowing green skirt. Then she sat down on the edge of the platform, pointing her toes toward the water. Her rich brown hair fell carelessly over her shoulders.

"If you aren't already my friend," said Stupe, "what can I do to make you my friend?"

"Tell me your name."

"Smith."

"Smith?" She passed the name over her tongue a few times, liking the effect. "It is a very pretty name. Are you proud of it?"

"To be honest, there are quite a few Smiths down where I come from," Stupe said, smiling. "But I wouldn't trade places with any other Smith just now."

HE SAT down beside her. He felt somewhat self-conscious. He had never considered himself much of a lady's man. He had always had difficulty trying to make conversation with girls. This girl was so wonderfully attractive that he was afraid his speeches would blunder off in strange directions. Just now he dared not remind himself that he had come on a mission for J. J. Wellington.

"How many other Smiths are there?" she asked. "Three or five? Not more than ten, I hope."

"Why do you hope that?"

"Because I do not know numbers in your language above ten."

Stupe smiled with amusement. What a naive person she was. In spite of her use of English, she knew hardly anything of earth ideas or meanings. Yet she was showing a friendly eagerness to learn. He was finding it quite easy to talk with her after all.

"In my world there were at least ten Smiths in my very block," Stupe laughed. "And I'll bet there were sixty thousand of them in my state."

"Sixty thousand?" The princess liked the word. "That sounds like lots more than ten. Do you know what I like about you?"

"No, what?"

"The funny face you have."

"What's funny about it?" Stupe took a mirror from his pocket and gazed at his tanned wide forehead and the careless twists of water-soaked hair above it.

"The holes in your nose, when you are sleeping, go wide and small, wide and small."

"There's nothing strange about that."

"Is it that way with all the Smiths?"

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"All the Smiths and all the Joneses too," said Stupe, laughing.

"Am I so funny?" she asked, enjoying his amusement without quite knowing why.

"Very. Do you know what I like about you?" Stupe was playfully mocking her. "I like the way you and Marble Boy ride through the water and go under without drowning. I'd vow that not another horse and rider in the solar system could do it."

"What is the solar system?"

"The solar system is—well—"

Stupe made a fumbling explanation. He soon found himself involved in the system of planets. He was getting in deep water, and she knew it, the quick little mischief. Whenever he hesitated on the number of miles between a planet and the sun, she volunteered, "Sixty thousand." It was her favorite number.

"I'd better swim back to shore before the afternoon gets any older," he said presently. "I'll need to eat again soon. I'll bet I've lost five pounds on this grind."

She looked up sympathetically. "Have you lost something? Maybe Marble Boy and I could help you look. Did you lose it in the water?"

"Didn't you ever hear of losing weight? You just lose it—you don't know when or where."

"Oh-h!" She shook her head, displaying a sympathy that was not intended to be comical.

"It isn't serious when you lose a few pounds." He tapped his bare chest. "I still have plenty. Guess what I weigh."

"Oh, how do I guess?" said the princess. "I do not know what it is to weigh. Maybe you weigh sixty-thousand."

"Ouch!" Stupe yelped, and then he laughed uproariously. "Heaven help me if I ever weigh sixty thousand. Even your horse doesn't weigh that much."

"He weighs eight," said the princess.

"Eight? Eight what? Pounds or tons?"

SHE shrugged her shoulders. She couldn't stop for technicalities. Pounds or tons, it made no difference to her. "His body is one, his neck is two, his head is three, his tail is four, his four legs make five, six, seven, eight. He weighs eight. See. I know all about figures up to ten."

"You're good," said Stupe, rising. He offered a hand and lifted her to her feet. "Now if you can find your way through fifty thousand nine hundred and ninety more numbers you'll reach sixty thousand."

She was looking up at him with a sort of hero-worshipping adoration, as if to say, How wonderful to know all of these fine sounding numbers.

"I am about to go," Stupe said. He still held her hand. It seemed proper that he should shake hands with her since he was about to go.

However, handshaking apparently did not have the same meaning for her. She was puzzled. She looked down at her arm and failed to discover any reason why it should be pumped up and down.

Marble Boy must have been distressed over all of this familiarity. He came over to them, his heavy hoofbeats quickening as if he sensed some danger to his mistress. He bowed his graceful head, with the best of manners, Stupe thought, nevertheless his long white nose came between the two of them and nuzzled protectively against the princess' side as if to move her away.

"Now, Marble Boy," the princess said, ruffling the snowy hairs above his eyes. "Don't you be getting nervous. This man is my guest. He is a stranger from another world, sixty thousand miles away."

"More than that," Stupe smiled.

"And he has a wonderful name—*Smith*."

The big stallion raised his head high, and Stupe didn't think his fiery eyes were any too friendly.

"It's getting late," said Stupe. "Do you see where the sun is?"

"Has it moved?" the princess asked, "or have *we* moved—or didn't I understand what you said about the solar system?"

"I'm going to have to move toward some food," Stupe declared, "or my own system is going to collapse."

"Food? Food?" The princess gestured toward the waters beneath the platform. "Why don't we go down? There's plenty of food down there. Shall we?"

Stupe gave an uncomfortable glance to-

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ward the center of the platform where, previously, the door had appeared and people had ascended a stairs to look for a possible prisoner.

"No, we don't go down that way," said the princess. "You may ride down with me on Marble Boy. It's safer."

She mounted and flung her flowing skirt to one side to make room back of her. Then she offered her hand and he leaped up. With a resounding splash they rode down into the waves.

CHAPTER XXII

IN HIS inner study somewhere in New York City, J. J. Wellington paced the floor with such vigor that his servants wondered whether he wouldn't begin to reduce. His numerous financial worries could hardly account for so much nervous energy. His luck was usually good. More often than not, his blustering and fuming over the probable loss of a few millions would be followed with an upturn in fortune that would prove all his worries a sham.

Far from reducing, he seemed to gain weight daily, so that he resembled the four-foot globe of Venus more than ever.

"Here is your drink, sir," his servant murmured.

"That psychiatrist is four minutes late," Wellington growled. "If he doesn't show up in the next minute, I'll cancel the appointment."

"There's the elevator now, sir—"

The psychiatrist, a handsome chap of thirty-eight with a clear complexion and steady eyes, took his time about removing his coat, settling down in an overstuffed chair, propping his feet on a footstool, and lighting a pipe. His pleasant and confident smile annoyed J. J. Wellington.

"I've come to the conclusion that you're barking up the wrong tree, Mr. Wellington."

The word bark was well chosen. Wellington barked now, giving a low, "Wrruff," that would have done justice to a true canine.

"In brief, I have come to the conclusion that there's nothing mentally wrong with Mr. Vest. I've been watching him for several days. He's a little queer, but these are only the surface mannerisms which anyone may acquire. Basically, he's quite sane and normal."

Wellington stomped across to the globe and gave his fingers an angry flip against the red triangle that represented the American Colony.

"Sane, is he? So you believe in all these nonsensical adventures he tells? You take stock in all these queer whop-de-poofs he claims he's seen? You'd better watch your reputation, Doc. Somebody will be putting a psychiatrist on your trail."

The psychiatrist gave a low laugh.

"I don't hold any briefs for the stories Mr. Vest tells, Mr. Wellington. It is quite outside my sphere to say whether these whop-de-poofs, as you call them, are more than the figments of Mr. Vest's imagination. So far as I know, he hasn't revealed in any of his lectures the story he told you of a beautiful sea-dwelling maiden who rides down into the waves on a white horse. It's barely possible that he was clever enough to coin this adventure solely for you."

For a moment the mighty financier purpled. If there was anything he couldn't endure it was the humiliation of being out-smarted by a man whose brains he was buying. Again he barked, a long and savage, "Wrrrowwff. That little devil."

"Does that clear up everything, Mr. Wellington?" the psychiatrist asked pleasantly.

Wellington turned, drew a deep cooling breath and smeared his perspiring forehead with a white handkerchief.

"All right, all right, what's the difference? *I* knew there wasn't any such freak in any sea, understand?"

"You knew?"

"Of course. But I didn't let him know I knew, see?"

"I—not exactly."

"Never mind, the deal went over. As long as Stupendous Smith *thinks* there's a girl—as long as the party has an excuse to stay on and plant a few outposts—"

The psychiatrist sat silently, his eyes half closed. Wellington suddenly realized

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that he might be talking too freely. He gestured abruptly.

"That's all, Doc. That's all. You've told me what I want to know. Send me your bill and we'll call it square."

As soon as the doctor had gone, Wellington rang for his secretary, and while waiting, he shuffled through some papers and photographs.

Here it was, the folder of clippings on Kreuger and his wife, explorers, rivals of Stupendous Smith.

"Yes, Mr. Wellington?" said his secretary.

"Any reply on that letter to Kreuger?"

"Not yet."

"Get him on the telephone. Tell him I'm planning to send another expedition to Venus as soon as possible. Stupe Smith has bogged down and needs help. I want Kreuger and his wife to organize another party as soon as possible. Got it? Okay, get busy. Have Kreuger in here for a conference this afternoon."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE American Embassy at the Venusian capital was on needles and pins. Ambassador Jewell had been cruelly embarrassed by the Wellington expedition, and his disturbed state of mind was contagious.

After the mysterious attack by the wingmen, gossip traveled outward in an ever widening circle, carrying with it a state of nerves.

In answer to numerous telephone calls from other officials, the ambassador's secretary replied, "Ambassador Jewell will issue a public pronouncement soon. He believes the wingman attack was nothing more than a reckless prank, and there is no reason to fear that it will be repeated. However, *he warns*—"

The secretary never failed to follow his statement with a warning to the populace to be on the alert against other sporadic outbursts of trouble.

Dame Rumor insisted that the recently arrived Wellington party was somehow responsible for the wingmen's possession of firearms. The ambassador realized the importance of interviewing Captain Meetz as soon as possible.

Upon several attempts, however, he found the door closed to him. At length he ordered his own personal physician to assist with the case.

"Captain Meetz's condition is no longer serious," his physician reported. "Dr. Jabetta has done a good job."

"I'd like for you to stay on the case," said the ambassador.

"Just as you say."

But Dr. Jabetta, with his quietly possessive manner, kept the captain's ailments well in his own hands. More often than not the ambassador's physician felt that his presence was superfluous.

On the night that the wind and rain pounded the windows of the Hotel, Dr. Jabetta, answering the physician's call, gave assurance that the captain was sleeping soundly.

"Have no worries, Doctor," Jabetta replied against the crackle of lightning. "I am with the captain. He is sleeping like a log."

After Jabetta hung up, the captain turned over with a groan. "Who says I'm sleeping like a log? How can I sleep against this devilish rain?"

"Worrying captain?"

"Feverish. The voices keep rattling in my ears—"

"Voices?"

"They keep arguing. They won't let me rest."

"Oh?" Dr. Jabetta's eyebrows raised slowly. He had been pacing the floor quietly, and his back was turned toward the bed, but through the wall mirror he gave the captain a look of curiosity which the latter did not see. Voices, Jabetta thought. He paused at the dresser to mix some medicines. The captain was shifting his pillow to block the light of the little pink night lamp out of his eyes.

"More medicine?" he asked sleepily.

"Swallow it quickly," Dr. Jabetta said.

THE captain downed the liquid, returned the glass, and turned over as if he intended to fall asleep at once. His eyes were closed and he lay very still for

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two or three minutes. Then abruptly he propped himself up on one elbow, his eyes wide open.

"If the ambassador doesn't get out of our way—"

"What are we going to do?" Dr. Jabetta asked. The captain began to gesture as if wide awake and in the middle of a long-winded discourse. "If he doesn't get out of the way, three things can happen. Are you listening, Dick? Good. Don't miss a word, my boy."

Dr. Jabetta came closer. His patient's imagination had been stirred. Dick Bracket was hundreds of miles away, but just now the captain believed the boy was present, listening in on a confidential discussion.

"Three things, Dick. In the first place, we can wait for Wellington to come through—"

A flare of lightning interrupted him.

"Snap off that light, Dick," he said. "I can talk better in the dark."

Jabetta turned off the night lamp and the room was in darkness. Now and then a flash of lightning across the Venus skies would reveal the sick man, sitting up in bed, his eyes blazing wildly as he raved.

"Six things can happen, Dick," he said, improving upon his original proposition. "If the ambassador doesn't get out of our way and let us plant the Wellington empire according to plan—Dick, stop smashing up the furniture."

A blast of thunder had broken in upon the speech. The captain took time out to scold Dick and several other imaginary listeners, until he seemed to be addressing a whole hall full of Wellington employees.

"Why can't all of you sit quietly and listen, like Dr. Jabetta? Ah! When the empire unfolds, Jabetta will be one of the governors."

"Go on with your speech," said Jabetta, sitting near the captain in the darkness. "If the ambassador doesn't get out of our way—"

"Any of ten things can happen." The captain's voice was beginning to grow a trifle sleepy. In a few minutes the momentary exhilaration of the drug would wear off—"Any of ten—"

"Name them, captain."

"One. The party stays right here waiting for his okay. Two. Stupe Smith goes exploring by himself to win his millions. Three. He gets disgusted because he doesn't have our support. Four. He can't find the girl he's looking for. Five. He loads a spaceship and goes back to earth. Six. He tells Wellington the expedition was a flop. Seven. Wellington sends another expedition. Eight. They high-pressure the ambassador and win their point. Nine. They bypass me and go out over Venus to plant outposts and start developing. Ten. I'm left out on a limb—and so are you and you and you."

"Eleven?" Jabetta suggested.

"They forget their promises."

"Twelve?"

"They hand us each a pick and shovel and tell us to go to work."

"Thirteen?"

"That's unlucky. They forget to send us our supplies, and we starve to death and the wingmen find us and laugh themselves sick."

The rain beat heavily against the panes. The thunder was swallowed up by the general roar. The captain groaned sleepily and settled down for a night's sleep. It was plain to Dr. Jabetta that he did not feel very optimistic over his prospects on this planet.

So the true purpose of Wellington's expedition was to lay the foundation for an empire. It was a big and daring enterprise for any financier, this dream of remaining on the earth while gathering Venus into the palm of his hand.

"Your thirteen points may not be so far off," Jabetta muttered just before the captain started to snore, "but personally, I wouldn't care to die for J. J. Wellington and have these wingmen laugh at me."

CHAPTER XXIV

"DOT tunder is getting verse effry minute," Gypsy Brown declared. She was rummaging around in the dark room. Velma, rousing up, was aware that the rain had been beating against the window.

"Who's scared of thunder?" Velma mur-

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mured sleepily.

"I am," said Gypsy. "I'm scared of *Venus* tunder and I don't care who knows it."

A prolonged flare of purple lightning revealed Gypsy in her red robe bending over a suitcase. Velma sat up in bed with a start. Was Gypsy packing? Where did she think she was going?

"If it's Venus thunder you're scared of," Velma said, "that will be gone in the morning. Maybe you're scared of Venus, period."

"Dot's vat I might be," said Gypsy. Velma went to her and tried to persuade her to come to bed.

"We musn't waken Selma. She needs her rest. Come on."

"Vare do you suppose Thelma is on such a night?"

"We won't talk about that," said Velma firmly. There had been endless hours of fearful speculations since the night that five members of the party flew off on an unauthorized jaunt. "I could worry myself sleepless, but I'm not going to. Now, you forget your fears, Gypsy, and tomorrow you unpack your suitcase."

"Tomorrow is der regular Venus Clipper to der earth."

"Stop that talk, Gypsy."

"I'm homesick," said Gypsy with a heartrending groan. "Already I'm so-o-o homesick."

"S-s-sh!"

"Honest, crossing my heart, der lightning and tunder, it does someting to me. And der vingmen—do you know someting, Felma?"

"I know you're scared silly about all these wingmen rumors. Listening to your foolish talk anyone would think that the whole city was about to be attacked by winged invaders."

"Do you know vot I saw out der vindow under der lightning?"

"What?"

"Vlip, vlop, vlip-vlop—der vings was skiffing along past der balcony uff our hotel."

Velma looked to the window. She wanted to scoff at this statement. But the truth was, she too had fancied something of the sort under that last flare of lightning.

"I'll draw the shades closer." As she moved cautiously through the darkness her bare feet bumped something on the floor. "Ooooh!"

"Vat iss? Vatt iss?"

"It's your darned suitcase," said Velma.

"Hs-s-sh. You'll vake your sister."

AT THIS, Selma gave an annoyed grunt. "Stop your clowning, you two. Who could sleep through a night like this?" Then suddenly Selma's voice gave forth a terrified shriek. *"Velma! Look out!"*

Velma swung around in alarm. Her arm accidentally struck the lever that latched the two halves of the French windows. They unlatched and flew open. With a furious *whoooof*, a wild gust of wind and rain blew in—and that wasn't all. What Selma had seen was the silhouette, against the lightning, of a man with wings.

"It's a winged man, Velma!" Selma cried. "He's coming in. Look out."

It was a fair question whether the dark winged form had any intention of coming in before the windows swung open and fairly blew him in. He had probably been scouting for just such an opening, testing one window after another, determined not to miss any opportunity this wild night might offer a plunderer.

His wings closed against his body and he leaped over the sill. To see him plunging through, highlighted by criss-crossing flares of lightning, his bare muscular arms streaming with rain, his long black hair half hiding his animal eyes, was enough to terrorize Velma into cold silence. But Gypsy found her voice and screamed a blood curdling scream.

"Der vings! Der vings! Yee-eeek!"

Lightning and thunder, screams, and thumping feet. Wind and rain, and the bumping of a suitcase against the window frame. The wingman had sticky hands, no doubt about it. He had seized the first thing he touched, and now away he went—two bounds over the balcony and a jump into the air.

A quick triple flash of lightning showed him winged, then wingless, then winged

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again as he flapped off into the storm hugging the suitcase to his body.

"My zootcase! *Yee-eeek!* Come back mit my best dresses and my cookbook, you doddarned thief!"

"Stop your cussing and help me get these windows closed," Velma commanded. At the same time Selma reached for the telephone to report to the management.

A window had been broken. The rain and wind howled through with a weird sound that Gypsy said was sure to drive her mad before morning.

CHAPTER XXV

THEY had turned on the light to survey the damages. Gypsy, beside herself over her loss, paced from one window to the other, sobbing, "My dresses! My cookbook! My brand new zootcase!" Her prized possessions had floated off into the sky. Her weird mumblings might have been incantations intended to bring them floating back.

The hotel engineer nailed boards over the window and one of the officials gave his assurance that the theft of the suitcase would be reported.

"Everything will be all right, ladies. Have no worries."

"Leaf der hammer," said Gypsy Brown, "and effryting vill be all right."

"*You'll* be safe," one of the men said sarcastically.

"Leaf der hammer." Gypsy was so insistent that she won her point. The hotel employees, chuckling, closed the door behind them.

"Now we'll get some sleep, I hope," Velma Stevens said. "Come to bed, Gypsy."

But Gypsy didn't come to bed. She sat in her robe, watching the windows and listening to the steady downpour. She argued that a criminal always returns to the scene of his crime, and if he chose to return she was going to give him the works.

"Hs-s-sh, Gypsy. You're all unstrung."

"Don't tell me hs-s-sh! Der virst pair of vings dot shows his vace on der balcony gets der hammer."

She was still repeating this threat when Velma drifted off to sleep.

Velma's sleep lasted until almost morning. She was awakened by the sound of an opening window.

"Gypsy, is that you?"

Gypsy was opening the window with one hand, raising the hammer with the other. The rain had ceased. The faintest gray was showing through the blackness. The tips of two upraised wings showed black and blurry just outside the window. A wingman was on the balcony—a *tiny* wingman. Gypsy was ready to strike with her hammer when the little creature gave a faint cry.

"Vot's dot? A *young* vun?" Gypsy lowered her hammer as she peered out at the dimly outlined object. Her voice was suddenly compassionate. "Vell, vell, leedle vun. Vare did you come vrom? You poor leedle rainsoaked fellow. Ain't you got no mamma? Come in and get some dry clothes on before you take your death uff cold."

Velma turned on a light, Selma awakened as if out of one bad dream into another. "More wingmen? Oh, a *young* one. Where did you come from?"

THE little fellow was standing on the sill of the open window. He was five or six years old, with chubby brown arms and legs and a pair of muddy feet. His big tearful eyes looked up at Gypsy in bewilderment. He must have liked her. He gave his little brownish-orange wings a shake, folded them back, and jumped lightly to the floor.

"Ain't you got no mamma?" Gypsy repeated in a soulful voice. "Come and tell Gypsy Brown all about it. Vare did you come from? Vot iss your name?"

"Name is Gooyay," the little boy said. He pressed his arms close against his sides and put his hands in the pockets of his orange colored trunks. "I tried to follow Tawkoo. He flied away from me."

"Now don't be crying, leedle vellow," Gypsy comforted. "You can be *my* Gooyay till he comes back." Then her eyebrows raised with an inspiration. "Vot's dis? Maybe he vlies avay because he steals a zootcase, vot? Um-hmm. *So!*

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I see. Vell, vell, vell." Gypsy began to smile. "Don't be sniffing. Tawkoo vill come back vor you, I bet. And he'll bring back my zootcase, I bet. Until he does, I keep you right vith me vor my own leedle Gooyay."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE morning after the storm a council of wingmen was held on the south slope of the Divide. It began as an informal discussion between Panno, the father of Gooyay, and Tawkoo.

Panno, a twenty-eight year old wingman with orange brown wings, had overtaken Tawkoo, the bluish-gray winged lad of twenty, to inquire about Gooyay.

"Gooyay followed you over the Divide yesterday afternoon," Panno said. "Where did you lead him?"

"I told him to go back to you," said the younger wingman. "He shouldn't have tried to follow me."

"Why shouldn't he? Were you going over to the forbidden city?"

The heavy chested, black winged Gunawoo circled over them and alighted to see what the argument was about. Gunawoo, who had stolen the explosive weapons from the earth men, was feared and dreaded by many of his fellow wingmen. He had boasted openly of his bold invasion of a dining-room in the capital city, where he had pulled the trigger of his explosive weapon many times and caused some of the earth men to fall. His prowess had made him the leader of the lawless element among the wingmen.

"Are you complaining," Gunawoo asked, "because Tawkoo flew across to the forbidden city?"

"He does not admit it," said Panno. "But I think that is where he went. And I think my son followed him."

"Your son should know better," said Gunawoo. "They have no respect for us unless we are large and powerful."

Gunawoo marched about, flexing his biceps and tossing his head proudly. Tawkoo rose, shrugging his shoulders.

"Wait," said Panno. "Tell me where you went. Which part of the city did you fly over?"

The two men wrangled, and all the wingmen who happened to fly over that part of the valley coasted down to see what the discussion was all about. Soon there were more than a hundred wingmen and women gathered in a circle. The larger the crowd, the more important the voice of Gunawoo became. He was a self-appointed referee.

"Every child has his own wings," Gunawoo said. "No child should fly so far that he can't return home."

"But last night's storm offered many dangers to a child," Panno protested. "If Tawkoo would only tell me which way he himself flew, I would know where to look for little Gooyay."

THE father's plea was a reasonable one, many of the wingmen believed. They knew that the little fellow was fond of high-spirited young men like Tawkoo, and his hero-worship might cause him to follow too far.

But Gunawoo wished to shield Tawkoo from any censure. If he had invaded the capital city, Gunawoo in his outlaw heart would applaud him for it. If there were any spoils, Gunawoo meant to have his share of them.

For these reasons, Gunawoo twisted the logic of the situation to exempt the bluish-gray winged Tawkoo from making any explanations.

Then, at high noon, the beautiful Latee, the mother of Gooyay, flew down to join the circle, and everyone saw that she had been flying hard and that her eyes were red from weeping. Gunawoo was silent now. The arrival of Latee was something he hadn't counted on.

Latee's wings were considered by some to be the most beautiful in the whole tribe that inhabited this part of the Divide. They were delicately colored—light greenish yellow, each with two dots of red that flashed in the sunlight. Gunawoo had often watched her with interest when she didn't know she was being observed. Now he stared at her with eyes of jealousy as Panno tried to comfort her.

"You should be searching instead of talking," she said to her husband. "I am

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afraid our little one has been struck by lightning. But I have searched all along the shore—"

"I think he went toward the forbidden city." It was Gunawoo's voice that interrupted. The big black winged leader marched into the center of the circle. "As I was about to say, when you arrived, we should organize a search party. All of us are concerned when one of us is lost."

"Yes, all of us should help," several wingmen quickly agreed.

Panno, who had been fighting a losing argument up to this moment, was puzzled by the sudden expressions of cooperation. It seemed that everyone was ready to help. Only the suggestion of a leader was needed.

"Tawkoo," said Gunawoo imperiously, "if this child may have followed you last evening, you must retrace your flight. We shall follow you, and our eyes shall comb every tree and every bush and every rooftop."

"But you said I didn't have to tell—"

Tawkoo's protest was cut short by the clamor of the crowd.

"Lead us," Gunawoo demanded. Then turning to Latee and favoring her with his handsomest smile, he said, "Do not worry. We shall follow Tawkoo—your husband and you and I—and we shall find your lost son, even if we have to search the very halls of the forbidden buildings."

"Thank you," said Latee. And she knew that although she was almost exhausted from her previous flights she must not refuse to go. "Panno and I are with you."

The party of more than a hundred wingmen rose into the sky and flew northward over the Divide toward the capital city.

The party of more than a hundred wingmen rose into the sky and flew northward over the Divide toward the capital city.

Four hours later they were hiding in the foothills near the city, waiting for their scouts to return. The roar of an airplane reached their ears. They watched the red and blue craft lift from the Venus spaceport. The noise was like a distant roll of thunder, far less earsplitting than the takeoffs of spaceships, but to them somehow more ominous.

When the scouts returned they knew. The news struck home with the weight of tragedy. Little Gooyay had departed with that plane.

"One of the women from the earth had taken him," the scout declared. "The earth party are on their way to the Southeast ocean. This woman was holding little Gooyay in her arms."

Latee paled, and her husband supported her. "You saw him? Was he crying?"

"On the contrary, he appeared to be very happy. The lady was joking with him."

Then Gunawoo took command. He pointed toward the sky and made his promise to Latee. "I will bring your child back to you. I will take the bravest and strongest with me and we will find your little Gooyay."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE snail upon which Dick Bracket had been tightly bound must have sensed that it was making snail history. If it had had the gift of speech it might have said:

"Look, fellow snails, I'm carrying a passenger. I'm going to give him a ride he won't forget."

The snail lumbered along slowly without knowing which direction it was going, though the rising heat may have warned it to seek a shadow for the coming afternoon.

Dick Bracket muttering to himself with unrighteous rage, made an effort to guide the creature by pulling to the right. The snail pulled to the left, which was exactly what Dick wanted. This would take him toward the hillside containing Stupe Smith's cave. That was where the rest of the party had gone, and as they now explored the premises it appeared that they wanted to forget him.

They had not gagged him. He was free to shout when he wished. That angered him. So they wanted to make him cry out for help. He'd show them. He wouldn't utter a cry. But just wait till he twisted himself free and got his hands on a gun.

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He'd make them dance to his music like they never danced before.

The snail was going too far to the left. Ahead was the open sea.

No use to shout now, even if Dick wanted to. They had left the cave and hiked on up to the top of the thirteenth finger ridge. They *had* forgot him.

Splash! The snail shuddered as it oozed into the shallow waters. Its bulk displaced enough water that, in spite of its passenger, it remained solidly upright and afloat.

Dick floated out into the sea.

He floated all day and all night. The dumb beast remained right-side-up. Otherwise it showed no signs of intelligence, for it made no effort to propel itself, but seemed content to drift on indefinitely.

If Dick had possessed a less calloused conscience, he might have reflected upon his own rash sins during these tortured hours. Instead, his theme song was, "I'll show 'em. Just wait till I get loose and get my hands on a gun . . ."

His threats and cursing were somewhat weakened after a long and seemingly hopeless night of drifting. Would the shore still be visible when dawn came?

LITTLE by little his bonds, which had tightened after his first encounter with the water, began to loosen. He awakened at daylight with the relieved feeling that something had *snapped.*

The chill of night was alleviated by the first kind shafts of red sunlight. Dick had dreamed murderous thoughts all night, and had once gone so far as to include Captain Meetz among his prospective victims. Now he breathed heavily, slowly, feeling that he had aged through the night.

Snap.

A rope slipped free. The tension on one of his arms was quite relieved. *Why?*

In answer, he saw that large green fish were attacking the snail from the underside. They were snapping off bites of the gelatinous flesh, darting down through the gray depths to enjoy their breakfast, then coming back for more.

Dawn revealed the coast line to be a dim blue shadow of irregular hills to the north. Dick was far enough out at sea that he could count five fingers—mounds of dull blue rising out of the sea.

Snap. The soggy snail was beginning to list.

Dick's hopes fell and rose by turns. Now again he thought there was a chance of drifting closer to the tenth finger before those fish ate the fleshy boat from under him.

Snap. The diminishing snail shuddered and wobbled. It had evidently become too much exhausted to resist these attacks by drawing itself into its shell. Had it done so, Dick would unquestionably have turned it over.

He was working at the ropes furiously now. The latest stab of the sharp-toothed fish had cut a rope clean, thereby freeing his right arm.

He was getting loose—little by little—both arms—his body—one leg.

He was compelled to sit carefully. Once his vigorous motions almost overbalanced the snail. It wouldn't do to be dumped here in mid-ocean. The prospect of a watery grave now began to haunt Dick. He tried to coax the beast shoreward.

Dip—dip—dip—

The white shell was beginning to slap the water on the starboard side.

"The wide ocean," Dick muttered with a shudder of fatalism. "I'd like to change places with Captain Meetz . . ." Yellow! Yellow waters! . . . *Lights under the sea!*

HIS discovery made him doubt his own senses at first. But when he saw within the circle of light a tiny platform standing a few feet above the level of the water, he was willing to take it at face value.

"I'm saved," he thought aloud. "Whatever this pumping station is, I'm saved."

His jaw tightened. To have one's life snatched from the jaws of death seemed to imply some providential encouragement for him to go on with his original plans. If he could get back to shore he would fight as he had never fought before.

He splashed over the side of his half-eaten snail, allowing the fragments of water-soaked rope to sink.

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His muscles all but refused to function, after their long imprisonment. But he managed to swim and soon reached the platform.

He rolled onto its warm surface weakly.

Swish!

At first the sound meant nothing more than the loud lapping of waters. But a shadow fell over him. He turned, amazed, and his bluish face went colorless. Some strange projection had risen out of the center of the platform.

A door in the wall of the projection opened, and an old man with stern eyes and flowing white whiskers stood there, staring.

"What's up, Grandpa?" Dick swung to his feet ready for trouble.

The old man's voice was cracked, but his eyes were alive with a feverish light of discovery.

"I told them!" he squawked. "They wouldn't believe me. Come. I'll show them. Come, come, young man. Don't stand there like an idiot."

"Where we going?" said Dick.

"Down," said the old man. He led the way down the spiral staircase and Dick followed.

CHAPTER XXIX

ON THE previous afternoon Stupe Smith had ridden down into the sea with the princess. He hadn't been quite sure, when he took that plunge, whether he had been prompted by duty—his obligation to J. J. Wellington—or his personal interest in the beautiful girl.

S-s-splash!

At the very moment of dashing into the water he sternly reminded himself that his original task—to capture the girl and bring her back to the earth—must be his first consideration.

Along with his crisscrossing motives he was quite aware that he was momentarily placing his life in her hands. It was a plunge to be taken on faith.

Ker-thoop! The water closed over the three of them—Marble Boy and the two riders.

Strange, Stupe thought, that a flash of memory should have brought back the image of pretty red-haired Mae Krueger at that moment. He had been in love with Mae once. They had parted good friends after a spirited quarrel over Stupe's refusal to avoid dangerous adventures. He had been infatuated with pretty Mae, but she had married his rival Krueger. So Stupe had gone on with his life of adventure uninterrupted by any further infatuations.

"Hold tight!" The girl's words were muffled by the sounds of thrashing water.

Down, down—how deep could they go, Stupe wondered, before his eardrums would burst from the pressure? He wanted to press his hands over them, but he was too busy following the good advice to hold tight.

His lungs tightened. In another moment they would be bursting for a breath. He looked up through the yellow water, calculating the distance to the surface. If he let go—if he took five or six upward strokes—

Darkness!

All at once the light that filtered down through fifteen or twenty feet of water was closed off. They were entering some sort of tunnel. The thumpity-thump of the stallion's hoofs on a solid surface jolted against his throbbing eardrums. A panic seized him. He was entering a trap. They were riding into a walled-in shaft. Now it would be impossible for him to let go and rise to the surface.

But all at once he knew that the pressure was easing. The tunnel path was leading upward. In the blackness he sensed that automatic doors were opening and closing. A rush of water almost struck him off. Then, suddenly, there was no water.

A BREATH. A deep full breath. His lungs and heart and spinning brain were instantly relieved. His eyes and ears and fingertips were throbbing hard, but every breath was a promise. Life was surging back. A moment earlier he would have traded his chances at a million dollars for one breath of air.

"Hold tight," the girl said, and this time her voice was a hum of echoes within the

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narrow passage. The stallion's hoofbeats melted together like rolling thunder.

Another descent. But not through water. The valves had been passed and the sea had been shut out. Down . . . down. Could the stallion's eyes penetrate this sticky darkness—or was this path so well known that the very hoofbeats had found a rhythm to its turns?

Down—down—spiralling swiftly, dizzily. A weird misty grayness was emerging out of the depths.

The lights and sounds and smells always would seem to Stupe, looking back on this moment, like the bursting of a new world upon his senses. Venus itself had been that, when he had first arrived. But here was a new world within a new world.

"Where *are* we going?" he called, clinging tight. The girl didn't hear him. They were thundering down, down through the darkness. The stallion's hoofbeats echoed within the narrow passageway like the roll of a score of drums.

Suddenly the walls of the passage materialized under a dim glow of light, pale blue. They were walls of glass-like substance with polished surfaces. The glances of light reminded Stupe of blue starlight glinting through spaceship windows.

By now, he guessed, they must have been at least sixty or seventy feet below their starting point near the water's surface. There was no sign of an ocean within these walls. As the lights grew brighter, however, Stupe could see the dark ocean pressing against the transparent surfaces from the outside. Occasionally a school of black fish with yellow eyes could be seen bumping their noses against the surfaces, then scurrying away at the sight of the approaching horse.

Marble Boy knew this track by heart, Stupe decided, and loved every turn. At the sight of an arch, lined with ribbons of light, the stallion broke his even running pace to a jubilant gallop.

"We are home!" the girl cried out.

But it all happened too suddenly for Stupe. With the first lurch his seat went out from under him and he bumped off the rear end. It took all of his tumbling skill to roll without injury and come to his feet.

The girl turned and saw what had happened. Instantly she leaped off the horse and came runinng back to him. Marble Boy clattered on alone, down the gently curved passage and out of sight.

"Do you not want to come?" the girl called, returning.

Stupe laughed to himself. "She thinks I changed my mind. It was the horse that changed his pace."

HE FELT a little self-conscious as she turned him around, touching his elbows and shoulders, examining him for injuries. So she knew he had fallen accidentally.

Her eyes twinkled with mischief. "Are you no longer hungry? Do you not want to come down and have food?"

"Sure I'm hungry," Stupe grinned. "Got any hamburgers?"

"Ham-hambers?"

"*Burgers*. You know. Ground steer in a bun." No, she wouldn't know. How could she? He tried to simplify the order. "It's fried meat between two slices of bread. It's yummy."

"Ah, you shall have hamburger," she said confidently. "Come. You shall have—"

"Now wait a minute, lady. Don't start whetting my appetite for something I know I can't have. After all, here we are down in the lost end of a strange world. Where would you get steers for your meat?"

"*There* is the meat," she said, nodding toward the plastic wall. Beyond, the light revealed a cluster of weird looking black fish with yellow eyes. As she pointed toward them, they darted off into the dark waters. "You shall have burgers."

Stupe gulped dubiously. "Fish-burgers?"

"I shall fix them myself. You will like my fish-burgers."

Under the conditions, thought Stupe, he would have to.

The girl stopped in a listening attitude and put a hand to her ear. Marble Boy's hoofs could no longer be heard.

"He has already reached home," said the girl. "We are almost there. Only a short walk to give you an appetite."

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CHAPTER XXX

STUPE'S suspicions were going out in all directions. The girl was talking too fast for him to catch everything. Her allusions to great numbers of people startled him.

"They live down there," she said, with a casual wave of her hand.

Stupe looked down at the floor of the parlor into which the tunnel had led them. He had thought this to be the bottom of the ocean. It was an opaque floor, of a plastic material similar to that of the ocean platform, but dark red in color. And solid. Was it possible that this structure could be somehow suspended, not firmly rooted to the ocean's floor?

"There are many people—like you—and me," the girl went on.

Stupe was finishing his third sandwich. At the moment the joy of eating could scarcely be disturbed by her remarks. Yet the foreshadowing of possible contacts with great numbers of undersea people called for wariness on his part. He hadn't forgotten the actions of the group on the platform who had come looking for a prisoner.

"If you will give me a chance to rest after this lunch," he said, "I think I can swim back by myself."

"You do not want to see the city in which my people live?" Disappointment was in her voice.

"Is it safe?"

The girl was laughing at him. Her response shot through him. Was she teasing? Making mischief? Or hurling a challenge at him?

"After you have seen my world, then perhaps—" she hesitated—"perhaps you will take me to see *your* world."

Stupe walked across the room leisurely, turning his back toward her. He was attempting to memorize the lay of the land. The tunnel through which he had descended branched in four or five directions at the entrance to "her home." He wanted to be sure—yes, the soft blue lights identified the passage. Again he glimpsed the dark fish with the yellow eyes exploring along the outsides of the walls.

A foreboding of peril haunted him. How easy it would be for that wall to crack, he thought, and let the sea come dashing in. He could hardly imagine people living here in a feeling of comfort and security. But if these undersea dwellers all possessed the girl's mysterious ability to go through the waves, then the terror might be as nothing to them.

NO, IT could not be dismissed so easily. The very weight of water that would press down upon them at this depth would crush out their lives unless they were something more than human.

He was still pondering these mysteries half an hour later when he dozed away on a soft couch. A flood of images crowded his sleepy thoughts. This couch was too soft—made of feathers—feathers from the wings of wingmen? What relationship existed between the winged and non-winged creatures of this world?

What of the prisoner that had been sought on the platform? Must one be found? Would a wingman eventually serve? Or would these sea dwellers find their way across to the mainland and seek out one of his own party—Hefty?

Hefty—Hefty—A hundred unanswered questions swarmed through Stupe's mind.

Hefty would think it a streak of luck if he knew that the girl had been found. He and the other members of the party would rejoice if they knew. They would make preparations to come at once—perhaps by plane—no, by raft. They would come prepared to capture the prize.

"Carefully. Gently."

Stupe, three-fourths asleep, had muttered the words aloud. Mentally he was protecting the girl. In fact, he was already tortured by his own infirmity of purpose. He was weakening in his resolve.

"No, no, I must not—" His fingers clenched tight. The prize could be won—diplomatically. Carefully. Tactfully. There need be no cruelty. *Had the girl not already suggested that she might wish to visit his land?*

This opened a new avenue of argument in his mind. If she were dissatisfied here, a flight to the earth would be the ideal de-

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liverance. Could it be that she was an outcast from this society?

"She lives apart," Stupe mumbled to himself. "No family—"

But she did have servants. He had seen four or five of them on his arrival here—two half grown boys dressed in single-piece brown uniforms which she had identified as servants' costumes. Two or three older women had been at work in an adjoining room preparing foods. No, this girl was no outcast or she would not be living in such luxury.

"Do you talk in your sleep always?"

The girl tapped him gently on the forehead. At once he was wide awake. She was smiling down at him.

"What funny things you mutter," she said. "You cannot be so angry as this for having eaten fishburgers."

He roused up, laughing. "Anything I said was strictly off the record."

"Good. Now you are ready to come with me to the observation balcony. We shall look down upon my city."

CHAPTER XXXI

STUPE had little idea what to expect when he walked with the "Princess" out to the observation balcony. The new undersea world burst upon him as a complete surprise. At first the yellow light from overhead was almost blinding. It was like a disc-shaped sun hanging in the top of a huge glass globe, or more accurately, half a globe.

This half globe, or inverted bowl, as he soon began to visualize it, reached from the top of the sea to the bottom—a distance of about eight hundred feet. The mile-wide circle of level floor was designed in the shape of a six-point star. The center of the star was directly beneath him. He could have dropped a rock from the edge of the suspended balcony on which he stood and it would have dropped into a pool of water eight hundred feet down. This pond was the center of an artificial garden, the center of the wide six-point plaza around which the city was built.

The white-metal structures which rose from each of the six parts of the city reminded him of six Eiffel towers. They looked strong enough to support the hemispherical enclosure, in spite of the weight of the sea.

Again Stupe was haunted by the peril of such an environment. One break in the surface of the hemisphere would allow the sea to come rushing in. Evidently the dwellers of this strange city had built with reference to this danger. The tiny houses beneath his gaze were curious mound-shaped structures. The strength of an arch is great, he knew. Each of these homes might be strong enough to resist the weight of the ocean, he reasoned.

"How many people live here?" Stupe asked.

The girl at his side gave him a quick smile. "Sixty-thousand," she said.

He laughed at her persistent mischief. Since she did not know figures in English, and he had no knowledge of the numbers she would name in her other language, he was left to his own guess. Along the star-shaped plaza and the many paths he could see less than two hundred. But this was only a small fraction of the population, he guessed. Within each of the six areas bounded by the plaza from the inside and the surrounding wall that formed the outer limits, there were, he estimated, at least three hundred houses. Three hundred times six—eighteen hundred or perhaps two thousand homes. If each home represented a family of five, a city of ten thousand Venusian souls was enclosed within this colossal upsidedown salad bowl.

HOW did they happen to be here? Why should they live under the sea? Where did they get their food and clothing? How had they managed to enclose themselves and shut the sea out?

"Nice piece of engineering," Stupe commented as his eyes roved over the upward curve of the distant wall. "Who did it?"

"Engineering?" the girl asked blankly.

"These white metal towers that support the egg-shell over our heads. This observation balcony. All those tunnels around the sides. Who drew up the plan for such weird living quarters?"

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In answer she pointed to the old man—the same white bearded man that Stupe had seen up on the surface—who now sat in a throne-like chair on a level several feet above their balcony.

"Ask him," she said. "He remembers all about it."

"Is he the architect?"

"He was a small boy when this city was built. His grandfather was the builder."

Stupe stared at the old man with new respect. The old fellow was studying him from under his bushy white brows.

"I saw him before—up on the surface," Stupe whispered.

"You need not be afraid of *him*. He is only lonesome and he would like to talk with you."

"What about those people who came up looking for a prisoner?"

"They may still be on top." She pointed to the spiral stairs that wound into the central shaft leading upward to the zenith.

Now Stupe began to get his bearings in relation to the little plastic platform above the sea. When he had rested up there in the sunlight, surrounded by the waves, he had been about fifty feet over his present station. A part of the shaft, enclosing the old man's "throne" and the spiral stairs, could be made to rise so that the upper end protruded through the circular platform, like a huge periscope. From it the guards at the top of this city could emerge on the surface to survey the sea and the mountains to the north.

The central shaft did not extend all the way to the ground like the center pole of a tent, but hung, chandelier-like, with the observation balcony attached to the lower end. Eight hundred feet of space separated Stupe's lofty perch from the city proper.

"Are you and your horse ever tempted to try a high dive from here?" he asked facetiously. "Or is that fish pond deep enough to catch you?"

"That is a dive for wingmen, but not for Marble Boy," she laughed. "He is good for water, but not for air."

A vague suspicion had been tantalizing him ever since their descent into the sea, and now it became sharp curiosity. Could this girl and her horse actually travel under the sea—or was it an illusion? After all, he himself had held his breath long enough to stay with them down through the waves until they reached the comparative safety of the tunnel.

He was upon the point of asking; but just then the old man coughed and snorted and waggled his head, so that Stupe guessed he was relaying a warning to the girl.

"Let us go around to the other side," she said. "Some of the guards from overhead may be returning."

HIS question was left unanswered for the present. But before the day was over his curiosity was destined to be satisfied.

"What does a stranger have to do to feel safe around here?" Stupe asked. "If these guards from overhead are scouting for a prisoner, their faces are gonna brighten when they see me."

He glanced back at the shaft. From the observation balcony, a web of foot bridges led off horizontally to make contact with each of the six Eiffel towers. Elevator cars could be seen within the towers, rising or lowering slowly.

There was little indication of speed or hurry in this undersea world. The little wheeled conveyors down on the surface moved almost silently. The slightest echoes of people's voices carried up to this elevation, but they were not the voices of agitated or worried people. Stupe caught the impression of a placid and orderly existence, in spite of the unaccountable setting.

"Everybody's relaxed except the guards and the old man," he observed. "And *me*. I keep feeling as if I'm about to be pounced upon. Are you sure—"

He broke off, unwilling to believe that he should hold any distrust toward her.

Her response was reassuring. "I shall see that you are dressed as one of my personal guests so that you will not be disturbed."

"Lady, you must have a lot of influence around here. What are you, the empress or queen or something?"

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The girl laughed. "About that I shall tell you more later."

"You haven't even told me your name."

She had led the way back to her own private palace. As he now realized, it was a special structure, built onto the outside of the huge undersea bowl. It must have been constructed especially for her needs, for there was, in addition to her own comfortable quarters, a stable for Marble Boy.

"Your name?" he repeated.

"My name is Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-dudu - Valletha - Kolello - Enyuperra - dudu - Ferroteela - Conzanzi - Methopop - Ling-"

"Wait a minute!"

"Vondokeel - dudu - Waparra - Opinokattra—dudu—"

"Stop it!" Stupe cried. "I lost out after the second dudu."

"But I did not finish. Come here. Let me show you."

"How did it start? Zaleena-Zaleese—?"

"You would not want to call me Zaleena-Zaleese. No, not you."

"Why not?"

"Because that is the name my people use for me when they worship me. You do not worship me."

"Are you sure about that?" Stupe said it under his breath. He was not sure why he said it. He only knew that this strange world was rapidly taking on new and different meanings for him. He had not had time to explain to himself just why he had come down here in the first place. Not that he had entirely forgotten his original mission. But gradually it had slipped in importance, compared to his personal interest in the most charming and mysterious person he had ever met.

NEITHER was he certain, by this time, that the ability of Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-dudu to ride through the waves on a white horse was the miraculous thing he had once thought it to be. But he was ready to concede that she did have *some* miraculous power, otherwise why had he such an interest in tagging her around like a little pet dog, down through tunnels, over bridges, over the city, and now back to her private palace?

She was unrolling a white ribbon that crackled like parchment. The characters scrawled on it in bright green paint were strange to him.

"There you have it," she was saying. "Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-dudu—"

She unrolled the entire ribbon. He had asked her name and she meant to answer him in full. It was plain that every separate name had a meaning for her. Stupe was growing dizzy. He thought it would be enough if he could remember Zaleena-Zaleese. Yet that seemed to mean something sacred which he was not supposed to understand.

"I'll just call you Dudu," he said in exasperation.

Her fingers let the ribbon slip to the floor. She looked at him with such wide eyes that it frightened him. Had he said the wrong thing?

"You will call me Dudu?" Her voice was suddenly gone. Her whisper was so tense that Stupe was alarmed. He had quick visions of being executed for blasphemy. She was accustomed to being worshipped, she had said. Did this mean that she was a deity? What had he done? She repeated, breathlessly, raising her hands toward him, *"You will call me Dudu?"*

He barely nodded, gulping.

Then she literally sprang at him, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the mouth—not once but six times.

"Dudu!" she repeated, and began all over again, kissing him and laughing, flooded with some strange joy, and kissing him again until she was out of breath.

He backed away, slightly dumbfounded over the magic of words. Unintentionally he murmured the word that was echoing in his ears. "Dudu."

It was a mistake. Again he was being smothered with kisses.

CHAPTER XXXII

BEFORE Stupe had visited the city below him, he had an opportunity to write a brief letter to Hefty. Perhaps it was foolish. There would be no mail ser-

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vice, no carrier pigeons, not even an accommodating messenger fish. However, Stupe, in the presence of all this wonder world, felt compelled to express his thoughts to someone.

"If I can chuck this message in a bottle —"In all the stories he had read, a message in a bottle always found its way to *someone.*

"Dear Hefty: You should be here. You'd never believe it. It takes your breath away. It's the most amazing, stupendous, colossal—"

At once Stupe was writing furiously. He felt that the pressure of time was upon him. He was not sure why. As he puzzled over his feelings he realized that this undersea world carried with it an air of impending doom. The very fact that he was enclosed within this 800-foot structure of "stone-glass" with the ocean above him was enough to weigh him down with an undefined fear.

"Wish you were here, Hefty, I need your moral support. Within the next hour or two I may visit the city below me. About ten thousand people live here. I have looked down on their homes—little stone mounds like Eskimo Igloos. They have a tower that runs up through the surface of the water. And who do you think keeps guard here at the top of their world? A white-bearded old fellow they call the Old Man.

"He's from the *earth,* Hefty. His grandfather is an engineer who constructed this gigantic solid bowl. It happened many years ago when the water was rising. This city would have been submerged. But they began building walls, higher and higher—"

Stupe used his most impressive rhetoric as he described the immensity of the engineering feat. And yet as he described the strength of this undersea structure, he was nevertheless thinking of his peril.

LATER after he had packed the letter away for safekeeping, he strolled to the balcony to view more critically the vast spaces around him. He wanted to write more. He wanted to write of Zaleena-Zaleese. But what should he say of her? What position did she occupy in relation to the other natives?

"Maybe the Old Man will give me the lowdown," he said to himself as he approached the central platform.

The Old Man was walking around aimlessly tapping his gray forehead. He would sweep the white locks over the back of his head with his thin fingers, muttering to himself. His hands gave an involuntary jerk as he saw Stupe beckon to him. Always on his guard, Stupe thought.

"Nice weather you have down here, sir," Stupe began casually.

"Weather?" The Old Man replied slowly. "Oh, yes, weather. All weather is the same down here. Nobody ever talks about it."

Stupe saw that the topic stirred long forgotten memories in the Old Man's dusty brain.

"If you talk about weather, you give yourself away. It proves you come from the outside. You'd better be careful."

That was a sharp warning. Perhaps the old fellow's brain wasn't so dusty after all.

"Thank you," Stupe said. He felt strangely humble in the Old Man's presence. Much as he wished to ask questions, he bided his time.

"You are young and strong," the Old Man said, studying him from head to foot. "The goddess has favored you by bringing you here. Will you stay here long?"

Stupe didn't know how to answer this. His real mission had to be crowded back into the hidden recesses of his thoughts. How could he justify his presence?

"Do you think she will let me stay?"

"You are a foreigner," the Old Man said, shaking his head slowly. "Foreigners get into trouble here."

"But you are a foreigner, the same as I."

"They honor me," the Old Man said, and his old eyes twinkled with pride. "I have been here many years—almost all my life."

Then to Stupe's delight the venerable man began to tell his story. They walked slowly around the platform, looking down on the city as Stupe listened to the recital of its strange history.

"The land was sinking," the Old Man

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said. "My grandfather knew what to do."

Stupe thought of the Thirteen Fingers. That sort of geological formation, he knew, was an indication of a sinking coastline. While the irregular coastlines of the earth were generally the result of very slowly sinking land, it was possible that on Venus the process might take place much more rapidly.

"My grandfather and I came to help them," said the Old Man. "At that time this city was almost as large as it is now. It had been built many centuries before."

"Under the sea?" Stupe asked.

"On the shore. On the level dry rock a mile above the water's edge. The houses were not built as mounds first. But as the ocean rose, season after season, the houses were in danger of flooding waves."

"Why didn't they move the city back?"

"I am told that they believed their ground was sacred. Their gods had chosen this spot. It would be a sacrilege to move."

"M-m-m," Stupe groaned. "I'll bet somebody got wet."

"In time it was necessary to build waterproof houses that would resist the waves," the Old Man passed wisps of his white beard through his fingers as if counting off the years. "Later they built a circular wall around the city. In time the wall had to be built higher. Eventually—"

"I understand," said Stupe. "At what point did you and your grandfather enter the picture?"

"WE WERE brought here when the wall was about one hundred feet high." The Old Man pointed past the balcony railing toward the base of the wall that curved around the outside edges of the town. "See the different shades of material? We had to thicken the vertical wall to build on it. We added those buttresses. Then we built on up and curved the wall toward the six towers."

"Strange," Stupe mused. "The people have deliberately trapped themselves."

"They reasoned right," the Old Man declared stubbornly. "If the land kept sinking, they couldn't go on raising the wall forever. My grandfather tested the stone glass. Wonderful material, son. Wonderful. He found it could be melted and shaped and cooled and made to stand stronger than the best steel."

The Old Man drew a proud breath as if he himself had performed the engineering feat. Stupe wondered if he too knew all of these wonderful tricks of architecture. Apparently the natives had honored him by giving him a place at the zenith of their world.

The Old Man might have talked more, but Stupe was called back to the palace of Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu. She had instructed her servants to provide a room for him. He must eat and rest. The "goddess" had not forgotten his strenuous swim of that morning. Now it was nearly night, he was told.

As for the "goddess"—as the Old Man had called her—she and her white horse were off again, galloping up through the dimly lighted blue tunnel on unknown errands.

Stupe waved as they disappeared.

A few moments later, as he was glancing toward the sleepy little city beneath, one of his earlier questions was answered. Could the girl ride through the sea for more than a few minutes at a time? Longer than she could hold her breath? *Could she breathe under water?*

"There she goes, friend," said the Old Man casually.

Through the thick glass-like walls Stupe could see the streak of whiteness as it pranced downward, outside the enclosure, toward the bottom of the sea. So swift was the progress that he might have guessed it to be a white shark plunging through the deep. Every stroke of the stallion's hoof counted for twenty-five or thirty feet, so rapid was the descent.

Stupe watched until the bleary figures disappeared. Then he knew. The girl's conquest of the sea was no fanciful rumor. She was somehow acclimated to the ocean depths—she and her mount. No wonder that the natives considered her some sort of deity.

"Wellington would like that," Stupe said, not meaning to speak aloud. "But I'll never—"

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"What's that, young man?" The Old Man was on the alert.

Stupe walked over to him. Something deep and strong was welling up out of his conscience. He rather liked the idea of having a witness.

"I hereby pledge, sir," he said to the Old Man, "in strictest confidence, you understand—"

"I can keep a secret. I'm full of them."

"I hereby pledge that I will never force that girl to go back to the earth with me.

The Old Man turned his back and Stupe thought he gave a funny little laugh.

"What did you say?" Stupe asked.

"Not a thing," said the Old Man. He climbed the spiral stairs to his throne chuckling and muttering lightheartedly to himself.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN Stupe awoke, several hours later, his first thoughts were of Hefty. A day and night had passed, he guessed, since the plane had sailed over him in the morning fog. Somewhere on the shore beyond the Thirteenth Finger his party would be looking for him in vain.

It never occurred to him, however, that one member of that party might, by a strange trick of fate, be moving toward him on the waves, on the back of a snail.

His second thought was of Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu. Had she returned?

"You have called me Dudu! Your words are so wonderful. You have called me . . ."

Were these echoes of a dream? No, she had talked with him for a few minutes in the night. She had bent over his bed and whispered strange mysteries to his sleeping ears.

"The Old Man has been waiting for years. *He* expects to marry me. But you have come. *You have called me Dudu. That means—*"

Stupe was wide awake now. The thoughts came flooding back. From his first encounter with this world he had known that a celebration was about to occur. In honor of whom?

"It is the anniversary of our building," the girl had whispered. "It is the Old Man's triumph. All of the people will march in his honor. But it will not be a marriage, as he expects . . . *because you have called me Dudu.*"

Stupe roused out of bed, a bed of wing-feather comforters. His heart was pounding. All at once he realized that he had fallen into a very complicated situation. He had better find Dudu and let her know the original purpose of his coming.

"No, that won't do," he said aloud. "I'd be sacrificed sure."

For now it came to him. She had explained that a sacrifice was supposed to be a part of the ceremony. They had waited for a foreigner to come. The Old Man must have known. Was that the reason he had smiled when Stupe spoke of his own pledge—his pledge never to take the goddess back to the earth with him?

A servant's costume was waiting for him and he dressed hurriedly. She had spoken of his disguising himself so he could visit the city. It would be safer not to dress in his own clothing. The costume consisted of tan slacks, a yellow shirt of sport design, and a yellow and white sash. His sandals swished along the floor as he hurried through the private palace to the observation balcony.

THE Old Man was still sleeping. Good. This was his chance to ascend to the surface. He crept cautiously up the spiral stairs. To think clearly he must draw a free breath and see the open skies. These hours of being enclosed had weighed upon him.

He glanced back, wondering whether any guards might have seen him. He wouldn't want Zaleena to think that he was running away. He wasn't. It was only that he must catch a free breath—

Ah! Morning sunlight. The fresh, cool air of the sea.

Now he discovered that his raft was still here, tied to the edge of the platform. This was his chance to recover his goods. For a moment he hesitated. The time for decision was at hand. The open sea was before him, the world of mystery was beneath him.

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Perhaps it was the image of the beautiful girl that dominated him in that moment. He gathered the goods from the raft and carried them down to his room. Then he returned, wondering whether he might hide the little raft so that it would be in readiness for an emergency.

Something floating along on the water attracted his attention. It appeared to be one of those giant snails with the red flesh and cream colored backs. But this snail was carrying something—something that looked very much like a man.

"What next?" Stupe mumbled. "Do they ride the sea on snails on this planet?"

He needed his binoculars to see what was going on. Apparently the snail's passenger was struggling with ropes. "I'd better tell Dudu."

Stupe bounded down the spiral stairs, but this time he was intercepted by the Old Man, who was just yawning out of his sleep.

"What is all the hurry about, guard?" the Old Man asked.

Stupe hesitated. If the Old Man took him for a guard or a servant, he had better answer in kind. "Someone is coming on the back of a snail." He felt that he should add "sir" or "your honor" or some other formal address, but the Old Man was too sleepy to notice.

"Snail?" the Old Man yawned.

"The beast is jerking around like something crazy," said Stupe.

"Some fish is nibbling at it," said the Old Man. "But I never heard of anybody riding one of the things. Ring for the other guards. Never mind, I'll do it."

The Old Man acted on his own suggestion at once. There was nothing Stupe could do but retreat.

A FEW minutes later, when Stupe descended for the first time to the city proper, he was aware that he had left a scene of trouble in his wake. Was it one of his own men who had come to the overhead port? He wondered. He tried to remember how Hefty had been dressed.

"Yea, gods, I wouldn't want that boy to get in bad." He looked back, wishing that Dudu might appear so that he could appeal to her.

"Come on," his servant companion said. "Here's the elevator."

It had been arranged that Stupe would work with a so-called "Egg-Inspector." What this meant Stupe did not know. But presently he was being introduced to a huge, sluggish official—a man whose costume was weighed with medals.

"Your new assistant, Inspector."

"Huh? Oh—er—all right, follow me."

The Inspector was preoccupied with the chase that was now going on high overhead. Some stranger had crashed the top gate of this citadel and had resisted the guards. He was being foolhardy, Stupe thought. Rashness on the part of foreigners is never good judgment.

"Come on," the Inspector repeated, placing a heavy metal hammer in Stupe's hand. "Get busy."

Stupe waited for more specific instructions.

After a sharp reprimand or two he began to catch on. He was supposed to test the "Eggs". These spherical objects, approximately ten feet in diameter, lined the walks of the residential district. For some strange reason each mound-shaped residence had a small sphere in its front yard. Eventually Stupe learned that these objects were safety devices—life boats, as it were.

"Tap them!" the Inspector barked. "Get busy."

Stupe pounded. He struck the first as if he were swinging a sixteen pound maul. The stone-glass sphere shuddered. The Inspector gave a startled jump. "Not so hard. That citizen is fussy. You'll have to build a new one if you break that."

So the inhabitants of this undersea world were prepared for the inpouring of a flood. As Stupe listened to the Inspector exchanging comments with the residents he understood. Regular flood drills were practiced. In case the walls of the city should spring a leak, every woman and child would enter one of these safety eggs, while the men would get busy with their flood fighting equipment.

The unusual building material, previously alluded to, was a natural substance very much like a plastic product—stone-

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glass. There were mines of it. With this natural resource it seemed that the builders were able to make houses, walls around their city, and fantastic towers with spiral steps that led to the observation platform overhead.

Another natural resource was the live steam—an inexhaustible supply of it from somewhere within the bowels of the planet. It furnished the power for the huge stone-glass hoses. The molten stuff was thus on tap at the summit of any tower.

FASCINATING as these devices were to Stupe's curiosity, he was much more concerned with the troubles of the stranger who had crashed the gates. Eight hundred feet overhead, barely discernible amid the confusion of guards, this intruder was chasing back and forth along the horizontal trails to and from the central balcony.

"Why don't they nab him?" the Inspector kept saying. Along the streets several of the natives had stopped to look up. Some had started toward the elevators to get in on the excitement. Now the Inspector took the hammer, tossed it at the foot of the nearest Egg, and repeated his favorite expression, "Come on."

The elevator was crowded with men, all jabbering in their native tongue, much too excited to notice Stupe. In his costume he was passing as one of them. And as he stood back of the Inspector, with the good manners of a subordinate, he was not likely to be noticed.

"Come on . . . Come on . . ."

The footbeats along the horizontal path high above the city echoed within the walls like low thunder. Suddenly the crowd stopped and began to surge backward. The stranger stood in their path. He was shouting wild threats, and although they could not understand his words, his insane fury held them at bay.

"Dick!" Stupe gasped, "Dick Bracket, how did he—"

It would have been impossible to shout loud enough for Dick to hear against all the clamor. What was Dick waving in his hand? Something like an immense candle. Out of the pandemonium Stupe caught two words from Dick's frenzied voice.

"Kill you . . . kill you . . . kill!"

The threat had magical effect. It gave Dick his moment to dodge into another pathway. Three guards were scampering out of the way. Was he carrying a stick of dynamite or some other explosive? Stupe recalled that he had made a visit to the arsenal only a few days before.

The race was on again. The crowd surged forward. The guards were closing in on Dick from three sides. His only escape was the metal tower. Suddenly he was climbing upward—up toward the curved ceiling. A dead end, thought Stupe. He has trapped himself now. Four guards followed him. One of them caught him by the heel.

"Kill!" the wild screech rang out. Like an animal fighting for his life Dick clung with one hand, kicking and snarling. Then he hurled the red stick. It flew straight toward the bridge where the crowd had gathered below him.

Someone tried to catch it—swung at it—batted it over the heads of the others. Then it struck the curved wall—

B L A M M M M!

The fire flashed hot before Stupe's eyes. Fire and a puff of white smoke. The crowds along the bridge went into a momentary panic. Stupe was no longer following at the heels of the Inspector. He was trying to dodge the stampede of frightened men. At the same time he edged forward hoping to make Dick Bracket hear his shout.

But Dick was making his escape now. The desperate young hothead leaped down to the bridge over the heads of two guards. Now he hurled a third overboard, and the kicking, writhing body fell through the eight hundred feet to be pulverized on the street. With a clear path back to the Old Man's spiral stairs, Dick Bracket streaked his way to freedom. Before the echo of the explosion died away, he had reached the surface.

CHAPTER XXXIV

EVERYTHING had happened so fast that Stupe hadn't had time to get his

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thoughts together. Where had Dick come from? Were other members of the party with him? Were they waiting overhead in a motorboat?

"If I could only have a word with Hefty—"

The crowd was drifting back to the level of the city by way of elevators and staircases, and Stupe saw that he had shaken his boss, at least temporarily. That was a break. He hurried around the circular balcony to the palace of Dudu.

"Where is she? Has she returned?"

Before the servant could answer him, he heard the swooshing skirts of the goddess as she swept in from blue-lighted tunnel.

"Were you calling for me?" Her melodious voice thrilled him as it had during the whispers of his recent dreams. He was more self-conscious now than he had been during their first conversations. So much had happened. Those unexpected kisses—the whispers of her ceremonial plans—the uncertainty of his own existence here.

"Did you see what happened on the balcony?" he asked. "*That* foreigner was one of my party—from my land."

The goddess frowned disapprovingly. "I did not care for his exhibition. There was no excuse for such rash behavior."

"Please do not think we are all like him," Stupe said. "He is a hothead—a criminal type. The whole party has been troubled by him. How did he get here? Do you know? Is it too late for me to overtake him?"

Stupe was becoming confused. The girl's searching eyes disturbed him. From his words he appeared to be in alliance with Dick. There was danger that he would break the trust which had sprung up between them. She was nodding slowly.

"If you wish to reach him with a message, I can help you."

"I want him to tell the others that I have found you—that you are real."

Dick Bracket was on his way back to see Captain Meetz. Out of his many motives, frustrated by the recent violence, he had chosen one course of action. He must tell the Captain about this amazing world beneath the sea.

AS HE plunged into the waters, he realized that the swim to shore would be too much for his strength. Yet that was his only route of escape. If only there would be a chance to rest—

Floundering in the waters he discovered the tiny raft tied beneath the island platform. Would he be safe here until he could collect his thoughts? He climbed aboard, edged into the streak of sunshine and allowed himself to relax.

Within twenty-four hours Dick Bracket had found his way back to the Venusian Capitol, to the bedside of Captain Meetz.

"Not so fast," the Captain said, rousing up and propping a pillow behind his back. "You're too excited, Dick. I can't make head nor tail of your story. Did the Doctor know you came in here? I'm supposed to be a sick man, you know."

"I slipped in without being seen. A few hours ago I was out there in the sea, hiding under that little platform."

"What little platform?"

"The one above the hidden city."

"What hidden city?"

"The one where the girl is—the girl that Wellington sent us here to find."

The pained expression of Captain Meetz was not from his bullet wound or his illness. His whole illusion about his Venusian venture was suddenly shaken.

"But that was a fake!" he exploded. "A trumped-up story. Wellington never took any stock in the fanciful yarn that Mr. Vest told about a beautiful girl on a white horse. You know that, Dick!"

Dick stared past the Captain. His lips were tight. In his eyes was the vision of a sapphire sea.

"I tell you, it's true, Captain. I was drifting back to shore on a little raft when *she* came to me."

"From where?"

"Right up out of the water. Hell, man, she was the most beautiful thing you ever saw. The spray of the sea was all over me as that big white stallion came dashing out of the waves, and there she was riding like a queen—"

"What have you been drinking?"

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"Not a damned thing."

"You look bad. You need rest and nourishment, I'll bet. You're not yourself. Now these plans for a Wellington empire—."

The Captain broke off sharply. His hotheaded young assistant was coming toward him, fists doubled. Such rash, insane behavior was typical. Back in the States there would be a straitjacket for this lad.

The Captain waved his hand in acquiescence. "All right, all right—go on with your story."

"You believe me?" Dick clutched the Captain by the shoulders. "I'm telling you, she's there! Out there in the waves! We've got to turn our whole scheme about—give Wellington what he sent us for. Capture that prize . . ."

THE captain might have suffered a relapse. To dream of an empire, organized in secret under the very nose of the authorities; to scream the well laid plans under the guise of a quest for a fantastic beauty needed by a billionaire for his show business—and then, out of a blue sky, to be informed that the declared prize was not a fantasy after all, but a living and breathing reality—this was enough to stun a sick man into insensibility.

Captain Meetz was not stunned. He was a man of great energy and drive.

"I'm getting up from here," he said.

"You'd better consult the doctor."

"Doctor be damned. I've got business to take care of. I'm going to get word back to Wellington—"

The captain was too busy with his own thoughts, to listen carefully to Dick's further talk about his encounter with the beautiful girl. But he caught a sketchy idea. Dick had had a glimpse of a world beneath the sea—a world where guards captured any foreigner who tried to intrude—a world where an earth man would come in handy for an urgent matter connected with a ritual—a world that Dick had escaped none too soon—a world where a beautiful goddess reigned with some mysterious power.

"She's a rare one," Dick conceded. "She followed me and tried to give me some message that she said was from Stupe Smith. But I was too smart for her. I wouldn't listen."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE camp which the earth party established above the Thirteenth Finger was enlivened by the presence of Gypsy Brown's little friend with the orange wings. When she and Thelma returned from an errand to the plane, they saw that some wood had been added to the campfire, and the camp stool had been moved up close.

"Somebody hass ben varming his veet at our vire," Gypsy Brown said.

"You sound like a recitation of the three bears," said Thelma. "Someone has been eating my porridge."

"Has it? I mean, did dey?" Gypsy asked, half in alarm. "Oh my! Somevun hass been eating my chocolate pies! And chust look! Dey left dere calling card."

"Where?" said Thelma.

"In der pie—sticking straight up. Dot rascal; dot leedle orange-vinged mischief!"

The "calling card" was a tiny orange feather, Gooyay's, unquestionably. The little vagabond had had his share of refreshment during their absence. He had eaten all of the pie except one piece. That piece he had stuck his feather on like a miniature flag.

"Dot vas to show us who done it," Gypsy said, "So ve vouldn't tink it vas a regular thief."

"By rights," said Thelma, "we ought to spank him. But if we did he would think it was a new earth joke, and he would laugh like a little monkey."

"I vould like to take him back to der earth with me," said Gypsy, "and veed him chocolate pies der rest of his life. Vith his vings he would be mine own leedle angel."

Thelma laughed at this. "With his wings you would have a merry time keeping track of him. He would fly across the country to play baseball, I'll bet, and how would you call him home when it was supper time?"

"Don't vorry," Gypsy said, with a wink,

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"Ven I bake chocolate pies, he don't forget about supper."

"You're right," said Thelma, "He'll come home—and bring all of the baseball team with him."

ALL but four members of the earth party were present at this oceanside camp. As Dr. Jabetta remarked, it was an unusual thing for so many of them to be reunited.

"The Captain should be with us too," the Doctor said, "He could be back on his feet now if he hadn't worried so much."

The other three members who were missing were Stupe Smith, Dick Bracket and Bull Fiddle. As to Stupe's strange disappearance there was much concern. Hefty and some of the others were scouting over the hills at present, trying to find some trace of him.

Dick's disappearance was a matter which was discussed only in secret. The few who had come in the first plane, brought here at the command of Dick, knew the dread secret—or believed they knew. They had last seen him tied to the back of a lumbering giant snail. They believed that he had been devoured.

The most unaccountable case was that of Bull Fiddle. At mid-day, shortly after the second plane had arrived, the first one had taken off. An unscheduled flight. Since only Bull Fiddle was unaccounted for, everyone assumed that he must have yielded to some perverse impulse to run away. Where had he gone? And why?

"Those Fiddle brothers are an erratic lot," the doctor said guardedly.

Gypsy Brown made no comment. Privately she was suspicious of everyone. The doctor needn't try to confide in her. She might share confidences with Hefty and the Stevens' sisters, but she knew she would learn more by keeping here ears open and her mouth shut.

"It looks like we'll be here for some time," the doctor went on, "With the captain out of the picture and Stupe and Dick both absent, we should hold an election to see who is boss."

"Who vunts to be bossed by a boss?" Gypsy Brown grumbled, and went about her business.

"You'd better keep a sharp watch over your little winged pet," the doctor said, deciding that some leadership was necessary. "There are probably more winged men around us than we know. Are you keeping him tied?"

Gypsy Brown nodded. She would look out for Gooyay all right. She hadn't forgotten that some winged rapscallion had stolen her suitcase. She was still determined to keep the little fellow as a hostage.

Everyone was worried because there was only one plane now, but neither the Stevens sisters nor Gypsy saw fit to invest any authority in Dr. Jabetta. Jake Fiddle was surly over his brother's unaccountable departure. The others preferred to leave him alone. Things looked black to Hefty. Stupe's disappearance had left the party in a hole.

LITTLE Hefty trudged wearily down the mountainside, the picture of fatigue and despair. It was nearly sunset, and he had been hiking all day. He settled himself on a folded blanket at the mouth of the cave, and one of the Stevens girls unlaced his shoes and prepared a foot-bath for him.

"No signs of Stupe?" Thelma Stevens asked.

"None." Hefty's voice was so hoarse he could hardly speak.

"Poor man, you've been shouting your lungs out all day long."

"Vat you need," said Gypsy, "is a vew good Sviss yodelers."

They tried to cheer him up with conversation, but he was too weary to respond.

"Chust leaf him alone," Gypsy said, "He needs some rest."

While the others prepared for their night's lodging in the hillside caves, Hefty looked out over the sloping valley to the calm sea. Tomorrow, he thought, he would fly out over the waters on the chance that he might find—what? An inhabited island? Another continent? Some low atoll that could not be seen from the mountain tops? It was not like Stupe to disappear without leaving a trail. Not unless he had been urged on by some promising

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pursuit.

The sky darkened. Hefty's eyes drifted along the crest of the mountains, watching for any signs of winged men. Soon, he knew, their dark forms would be floating overhead. They would, no doubt, flock around the plane, attempting to enter it. But the Stevens girls had checked everything.

Suddenly, Hefty's attention was attracted by the splash of waters about two hundred yards to the south. In the twilight he could not be sure what had made the noise. A dark object seemed to be plunging up out of the sea. It was coming fast. It struck the bank with a gallop of hoofs.

"*THE girl on the horse!*" Hefty exclaimed automatically. That apparition which Mr. Vest had once described so vividly leaped into his mind. In his tired state he could hardly trust his own senses, but the reality was there—the pounding of hoofs—the running object growing whiter as it approached—a powerful white stallion bearing a lone rider.

Before Hefty could break out of his momentary paralysis, the girl was riding past him. She carried a harpoon in her right hand which she waved against the sky. Something was attached to the harpoon—a small fish perhaps. At the moment that was the least of his interests. A cool breeze whipped his face. A flutter of the girl's robe sounded upon his ears like the terrifying beat of an invader's wings, but this girl was not a winged creature. She was simply the most dazzling phantom of a magic night that Hefty could possibly imagine.

"What's going on out there?" came the shout of Dr. Jabetta from one of the caves.

Hefty couldn't answer. He was speechless. The passing sight absorbed him so completely that he was frozen to the spot. He saw the horse swing about and come galloping back. The harpoon was waving like a fan, and Hefty shrank, believing that the girl was about to hurl it at him. As the hoofs thundered toward him, they slowed a trifle. The girl was calling something to him. She shook the harpoon in such a way that the object it held fell free. It floated to the ground.

It was a letter—and Hefty was no longer a statue. He was scrambling over the ground to recover it before the other members of the party emerged from the caves. As they appeared, bobbing out two and three at a time, calling all manner of frightened questions, Hefty waved them away with noncommittal answers.

"Wingmen?"

"Must have been," Hefty replied, trying to appear unruffled. "They went so fast I couldn't see them. Must have been a whole flock of 'em."

He had hidden the letter inside his shirt.

"You'd better get inside where it's safe."

"Reckon I'd better," Hefty agreed. He started in and fainted dead away.

"What's the matter with him?" Dr. Jabetta said. "Get back, folks, and give him air. Let's open his collar—."

When Hefty came to his senses, he saw a mystified group around him, demanding to know where he had gotten *this*.

"What is it?" he asked blankly.

"It's a letter to you. It's from Stupe Smith."

CHAPTER XXXVI

BY STARLIGHT the flock of wingmen alighted at the edge of the bluff somewhere above the South East Ocean. Gunawoo gathered the group around him and launched into an oration. He knew that many of his companions were near exhaustion after the long flight. It gave him a sense of power to be ready with a speech that would set the next course of action.

"Breathe deeply, my men. Relax your wings. We will not undertake an attack until nearly dawn. You will find food in abundance at the upper edges of the next line of mountains. Feed lightly and then sleep. I shall awaken you in time."

Gunawoo took a few scouts with him and proceeded to the Thirteenth Finger. They flew low so that they would not be seen against the sky.

One of them called, "There is the sky

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machine. See it? Toward the sea—"

Gunawoo led the party in a wide circle to the East of the dark object on the beach. Within a hundred yards of it they fluttered down and proceeded on foot. No word was spoken. They advanced with every expectation that they would meet a guard.

"Wait," Gunawoo whispered. "There should be two sky ships, not one. We do not know whether this is the one we followed."

"I will remember the design on the wings," one of the scouts said.

They moved closer and the scout took a separate course. If Gunawoo could draw the guard away the scout would have a chance to examine the design.

"Get down," Gunawoo commanded in a whisper. His three companions followed his actions. As they crouched against the sand, Gunawoo began to scrape his hands over the surface. He found some stones and began to beat them together, lightly at first, then louder. Then he stopped and listened.

From out of the darkness came the voice of an Earth Man.

"Who's there?"

A flashlight went on. It began to sweep the ground a little distance before them.

"Lie low," Gunawoo whispered. They remained in a huddle, their faces against the sand. The light was approaching them slowly.

"Who's there?"

THEY waited until the approaching guard came within thirty feet then Gunawoo gave the signal and they leaped up simultaneously. As was their custom, they flew outward in all directions. The light staged a series of zigzag streaks that caught their wing tips. The guard was running back toward his plane. Perhaps he sensed that this was a ruse.

"This way!" Gunawoo shouted.

A few moments later the other scout rejoined them and his report was satisfactory. This was the plane in which little Gooyay had been kidnaped. Gunawoo was elated. Now he could boast he had been certain, all along, that this was the plane they had pursued. They would set their plans for the last hour of night.

One of the scouts suggested that little Gooyay might be expecting winged visitors at this very moment.

"If we would fly along the line of caves, flapping our wings, he might come out."

"I am making the plans," said Gunawoo. "To rescue Gooyay is one thing, to capture some magical supplies is quite another. We need the first glimpse of morning light."

An hour before dawn Dr. Jabetta was doing sentinel duty. He was armed with a pistol and a flashlight and as he trudged back and forth past the entrances to the caves he wondered whether the night would pass without trouble. Each time he walked toward a certain tooth-shaped rock he tried to visualize his actions in case a wingman should spring up from behind it. Would he shoot first and ask questions afterward? Would he follow the wishes of the American Ambassador and try to talk his way to peace?

The black sky was softening with a first hint of morning gray. Dr. Jabetta scanned every dim line along the hills. His vigil would soon be over. Then he could sleep the forenoon away, he hoped.

A slight flutter sounded from somewhere up the mountainside. He stopped, listened.

From inside one of the caves he heard the faint whimper of little Gooyay, stirring in his sleep. Gypsy Brown had tied a cord to the little fellow's ankle so he wouldn't slip away in the night—not without a warning jerk on the cord, the other end of which was tied to her own ankle.

The whimper quieted. Gooyay had probably gone back to sleep. He had not been frightened by the strange company. The bond of affection which had so quickly sprung up between him and Gypsy Brown was remarkable.

SOFT footfalls were audible from another direction. Jabetta turned slowly, angering. No wingmen could be seen, yet he felt that they might be all around him, closing in for the kill.

"I should warn the party," he said to himself. He had a vision of Gypsy Brown and the Stevens sisters being massacred

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in their sleep. "It would be a crime, they say, to take a shot at those wings."

Mumbling to himself, he carefully slipped his pistol into his pocket and drew forth something else—a tiny object smaller than his little finger.

Rustle . . . Rustle . . . The unseen wingmen were close around him in the thinning darkness. They would hear his voice if he called. He walked toward the tooth-shaped rock.

"Hello . . . Hello . . ."

His voice sounded hollow.

"Hello, wingmen . . ."

No answer.

"I have a gift for the leader of your band. Do you hear me? Is the leader of your band a coward?"

Before the graying tooth of stone Dr. Jabetta repeated his challenge. Between his slow spoken words he could hear guarded whispers.

"If the leader of your band will step forth and shake hands with me I will give him a gift. But let me warn him—if he is a coward, he will not dare to shake hands with me. He will not dare—"

A squawking, metallic voice called out an answer. It came from behind the very tooth-shaped rock. Dr. Jabetta had guessed right. The leader had chosen that advanced position.

"You would dare to shake my hand?" came the voice. Gunawoo, the black-winged leader stepped out of hiding. He pranced forth like a conqueror, and though the doctor knew nothing of his name or identity, he guessed from the wingman's actions, that a host of wingmen must be watching him.

Gunawoo leaped to the top of the rock, gave a quick proud flutter and an arrogant squawk.

"We'll see who is the coward."

He leaped down and took three steps toward his challenger.

Doctor Jabetta extended his right hand. Between his fingers the hypodermic needle was ready.

They shook hands. The big black winged fellow gave a little gasp of pain and surprise.

Dawn's soft light must have revealed that weird meeting to countless pairs of curious eyes. The faint whispers could be heard from many directions. The *ahs* of surprise!

Gunawoo towered tall. His wings jerked outward, twitched strangely, then dropped. Gunawoo was staggering — stumbling — falling!

Crunch! One of his handsome wings folded under him as he went down. He rolled onto it, half a turn, and then lay still in death.

Dr. Jabetta stood poised like a statue, right hand extended.

"Hello . . . Hello . . ." he called. "Is there a leader of the wingmen who will step forth and shake hands with me?"

The whispers had ceased.

Dr. Jabetta did not repeat the challenge. He simply stood, waiting. His throat had tightened. He was afraid that his voice would crack if he indulged in one more thunderous shout. The fact was, Dr. Jabetta was scared.

But temporarily, at least, he had won his battle. Now the barely audible shuffling of footsteps assured him that the enemy were returning. They would move back into the hills quietly. He had won a delaying action.

A few minutes later Gypsy Brown confronted him at one of the cave entrances.

"Vonderful! Vonderful!"

"Did you hear?"

"Effryting!" She shook her head as if trying to shake out of her dizziness. "Ven he came out to shake hands I vas so scared I almost died. But he beat me to it. Iss he dead?"

"He acts like it."

"Ooh," said Gypsy, "could I haf a veather vor a souvenir? Vat you tink made him die so quick?"

"I wouldn't know," said the doctor.

CHAPTER XXXVII

DOWN in the world which Stupendous Smith had called an inverted salad bowl under the sea, the stone-glass wall was leaking. Here was news. Every resident of the submarine city was concerned by this most unusual happening.

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The cause of the leak was well known. A "foreigner" had invaded the premises, had resisted seizure, had climbed out of reach of the guards, and had thrown an explosive stick at them. The stick had bounced against the glass wall and caused a dreadful flash of fire.

At the time the black blotch which the explosion had left on the wall had not been considered a threat to the safety of the people. Most of the talk had concerned the stupidity of the guards. How could they have been so careless as to let a marauder slip through their fingers? They should be investigated. Political appointees, no doubt.

But within a few hours someone roused out of his night's sleep, awakened by the steady swish of water flowing down the surface of the wall. It was a flat stream, less than two feet wide, and slow. Just enough to be audible. They reported their find to the Egg Inspector.

Let it be said that the Inspector, for all his years of preparing the city for danger, was no alarmist. A lesser man might have pulled the signal cord that would have set off the wild clanging of six alarm bells, one in each of the supporting towers. The Inspector, being fonder of a full night's sleep than an hour of official glory, listened to the report of particulars and nodded.

"It is not serious," he said. "Go back to bed."

Then he turned over and went to sleep.

True, the leak did not appear serious to any of the officials when they examined it the following day. If it had not been for the smoky blotch reminiscent of the flash of fire, the citizens might have taken the event to be nothing.

But the water kept coming.

Stupendous Smith wondered what Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu would say when she returned. She had ridden away through the sea soon after the recent violence.

STUPE was again pressed into service as an assistant to the Inspector. He stood by while the engineers dragged the end of the giant caterpillar-shaped hose from a nearby tower to the point of the leak. The Old Man was called over from his balcony throne to oversee the operations.

"Start the patch at the underside," the Old Man advised, "and build it wide and thick."

Out of the hose a stream of stone-glass poured forth in molten form, pressed out by the force of live steam.

Stupe thought of a gigantic garden hose spouting a spray of glue.

The soft spot, small enough that it might have been plugged by a book, was surrounded by ten foot streaks from the explosion. When the stone-glass workers finished their patch, the whole blotched area was covered.

"There," said the Old Man. "You'll have no more trouble."

"A good job," said the Inspector. Then he chuckled, "When we have flood drill this season the people will remember this little incident. They'll think it's the real thing."

A few hours later someone reported that the wall was leaking again—a very fine stream. The Inspector laughed and said not to worry, it was only the moisture draining down from the new patch.

Stupe continued to make the rounds of the Eggs with the Inspector and it proved to be an interesting job. The housewives would come out of their shell-like houses to exchange all their latest gossip. The Inspector was an artist at carrying gossip. He could add to or substract from any story just enough to tantalize his listeners, who would presently be seen trailing across to some neighbor's house to compare notes. He could shift his allegiance as readily as a chameleon changes its colors. Each of the six points of the star-shaped city was a separate neighborhood, and each prided itself on being more aristocratic than the others. The Inspector nourished these petty prides by weighing his daily supply of news.

"He's a regular village newspaper," thought Stupe. "No, a metropolitan newspaper with a different edition for each section of the city."

The invasion of the "foreigner" had become such all-absorbing news that Stupe

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was kept on needles and pins. Sooner or later someone was going to discover that he too was a foreigner, in spite of his native clothes and make-up. However, as long as he did the work and the Inspector did the talking, everything went well.

Stupe experienced a chilling fear when their rounds brought them back to that section of vertical wall directly beneath the new patch.

"It's still leaking," said the resident of that area. "You ought to do something, Inspector. Your patch is no good."

THE Inspector shuddered throughout his tremendous bulk, so that the medals on his chest tinkled. His eyebrows went up and down and up again. He saw that the water was sliding down in a smooth three foot sheet, almost silently. At the foot of the wall it had formed a muddy pool that was spreading into the man's garden and running off along the edge of the sidewalk.

The Inspector turned to Stupe and said, "Come on."

"Another patch?" said Stupe.

"What do you mean, another patch. That first patch was no patch. What that wall needs is a real patch. Come on."

That evening, after another fray with the caterpillar-shaped hose, Stupe returned to his room at the palace of Zaleena. He was weary and his hands were blistered and reeking with the smell of stone-glass. In his soiled costume he was a sorry sight to come before the most attractive girl he had ever seen.

"Zaleena has asked you to come into her study," one of the servants told him.

Soft purple lights splashed upward along the curved walls of the room. He seemed to be walking through the mist of a dream. One corner was brilliantly lighted, however, by a deep amber glow above the circular silver desk. The light was like a canopy over the desk, a series of illuminated concentric circles. The effect like something magic. The Goddess sat at the desk reading a book. Her dark hair was highlighted with amber fire. Purple shadows played at her fingertips. It was like a scene from a child's fairy story, Stupe thought—a fairy princess in a jewelled gown, reading some ancient pages that had been inscribed by the hand of some unknown mystic.

Stupe hesitated.

"Are you afraid of me?" the girl asked, looking up.

He smiled. "I ought to be dressed up in a dress suit or something."

"Sit down, please. I want to ask you something."

Stupe bowed and took a chair near her. She motioned to him to come closer. Then he was sitting at the desk beside her, watching as she moved her finger along the hand-written page.

"I can't read it," Stupe said. "It isn't my language."

She was looking at him intently, smiling at the corners of her lips, and he wondered what she was thinking.

"Do you remember what you called me one time—that day when I first told you my name?"

"You mean—" Of course he remembered.

"Yes," she said. "You called me Dudu, my fourth name. You called me Dudu and I kissed you."

He nodded, watching her closely, not knowing what to say.

"Why have you never called me Dudu again? . . . Don't you know?- . . . Didn't you see that it made me very happy? Or did you not like it when I kissed you?"

The heat swept through Stupe's forehead. He groped for words that would give her the honest answer she sought.

"I want you to be happy," he said. "If I call you a certain name, does that alone make you happy?"

"Only if it makes *you* happy, too," she said.

He was smiling at her intently. "But I do not know the meaning of the name."

"If you call me Zaleena-Zaleese you are worshipping me as my people worship me . . . as a deity. But if you call me Dudu, that is because you have decided you are the one to love me. It is because you wish to be the one—" Her wistful smile turned away from him. Her fingers softly twisted the corners of the page she had been read-

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ing. "Now you know . . . and you will not call me Dudu again . . . not unless you understand . . . what it means . . . to me . . . — sweetheart . . ."

Her words were lost, then, in the breathlessness of a long moment through which Stupe had chosen to whisper, "Dudu!" over and over again, kissing her twice with each whisper.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WELLINGTON watched the take-off at the space port on that momentous Saturday morning when he sent his second expedition to Venus.

The ship charged off into the sky with a mighty roar. Wellington shuddered, then remembering himself, he smiled for the cameras. There were always cameras when Wellington appeared in public.

"What's it all about, Mr. Wellington?" "Did you finance the expidition, Mr. Wellington?" "Are the Kruegers personal friends of yours, Mr. Wellington?" "Any statement for the press, J. J.?"

J. J. Wellington turned his questioners off with an amused chuckle. "See my press agent, boys."

Inwardly, he was far less complacent. He had had only a few scattered reports from the first expedition. None of them were particularly favorable. It seemed that the American ambassador was watching everything too closely. Well, the second expedition would make its mark.

The second expedition had been loaded down with fully three times as much equipment as the first. Equipment—yes, any inspector would recognize that here was the beginning of pioneer outposts. A Wellington colony was about to be planted.

As Mr. Wellington was about to step into his limousine he was confronted by the eccentric little Mr. Vest.

"Ah, how do you do, Mr. Wellington. You remember me, I presume?"

Wellington gave a disturbed, "Wrrff" and tried to brush past the little man. But Mr. Vest was persistent.

"I am curious to know, Mr. Wellington, what has developed since I gave you the information about Venus." Mr. Vest stepped into the car after Wellington. They drove down the street together, Vest talking brightly, Wellington trying to maintain his stubborn silence.

"It will make big news in the papers," Mr. Vest went on, "when your party returns with a pretty girl who can ride under the sea. Have you decided to establish a new night club in her honor?"

"Mr. Vest, you annoy me. Shall I let you out at the next corner?"

"But Mr. Wellington," the shocked little man pleaded, "you were so enthusiastic about the idea. What has happened? Aren't you—aren't you—haven't you—just sent another party in search—?"

WELLINGTON'S scowl deepened into lines of rage. "Of all the wild goose chases! Mr. Vest, I ought to sue you for a million dollars. By Jove, I think I'll do it!"

"Why? What have I done?

"You've sold me a bad dream, that's what. For the past weeks I've been burning up dollars like sawdust. All because you thought you saw a beautiful girl riding under the sea."

"But I did! I did! I swear on a stack of bibles—" The little man's indignant protest became a violent squawk. The chauffeur slowed down at the curb, and looked back to Wellington for his cue. Wellington nodded. The chauffeur opened the door.

"Will you get out," Wellington barked, "or shall I call the police?"

As the limousine pulled away, Mr. Vest stood at the curb shaking his fist, shouting, "You'll live to regret this, Wellington, you'll apologize to me some day."

* * *

Ambassador Jewell of Venus was a man of integrity. It had never occurred to him or any of his associates that his problems on this planet might grow too big for him. But things had been happening so thick and fast during the recent weeks that he admitted to himself this morning that he was staggering. He faced himself in the mirror, talking to himself as he shaved. The lines of worry around his eyes had deepened. He tightened his

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lips with determination.

"I wasn't cut out to be a dictator," he said, "I never believed in the iron hand, but no one is going to make a fool of me. If it takes military discipline to keep my house in order, I'll not flinch."

He had arisen with a new inspiration this morning, and had acted upon it at once. A telephone call to his secretary had started the ball rolling.

An hour later he stood before a group of twenty picked men, all wearing the sharp blue uniforms of Venus Capitol Guards. Without command, the men had arranged themselves in a line before him and come to attention. They were not only fine specimens, physically, they were men who had been proven trustworthy. He could confide in them.

"I shall speak to you frankly," he began. "You have watched the startling developments of recent days since the arrival of the Wellington expedition. Do you know why this expedition was organized? Our Capitol newspaper did not give you the full answer. I have reason to believe—"

The Ambassador paused impressively, studying the intent expressions before him.

"I have reason to believe that the American billionaire who is financing this expedition is harboring in the back of his mind a colossal scheme—a political scheme which amounts to insurrection."

HIS listeners stood in silence. He drew a deep breath and went on.

"It is my duty to nip this plot in the bud. That is why I brought you together. You are to keep this information in strictest confidence. Today you will be assigned to midget planes and will begin a survey of the territory toward the Southeast Ocean. I have specific instructions for each of you . . ."

Two hours later the planes took off on their mission. Ambassador Jewell stood on the porch of the embassy building watching them disappear into the sun. Now he was breathing more easily. It had been too much for one man to keep watch on the wily activities of Captain Meetz and his heterogeneous crew. Recently the Captain had left his sick bed and had gone forth ostensibly to resume command of his party. Like several other flights of the two Wellington planes, this one had been unauthorized. In the preceding days the Captain had dodged the Ambassador's every attempt to interview him.

"Meetz has it coming," the Ambassador said to himself. "He has been obstreperous from the start. Now his every move will be guarded and reported to me."

The Ambassador's reverie was broken by the low roar of an approaching space ship. He glanced at his watch. This wasn't the regularly scheduled arrival of the Venus-Earth Clipper. No, it was a strange ship.

Jewell walked into the reception room, and picked up the nearest telephone. He contacted his secretary.

"A new ship is coming in. Has it radioed in advance?"

"The message was just received," the secretary replied. "It is another ship from the earth—another J. J. Wellington expedition."

The Ambassador groaned and dropped the telephone. Another Wellington expedition! More grief!

CHAPTER XXXIX

DR. JABETTA had offered to shake hands with the leader of the wingmen, and the result had been death. Death from a hypodermic needle had struck the tall, black-winged Gunawoo.

From their hiding places among the rocks and trees, scores of wingmen saw Gunawoo fall. They did not understand why. But they had heard the doctor's words. He had warned that a wingman who greeted him must not be a coward.

Had Gunawoo been a coward? The wingmen trembled, wondering. They saw the doctor standing there, a dark form against the graying morning sky. He stood in an attitude of awe, as if he, himself, had been surprised at the sudden stroke of death.

They heard voices of other earth people, calling to him from the caves, and they understood, as the doctor bent to take a few feathers from Gunawoo's wing, that

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these were trophies.

But there had been no explosion of firearms. What had caused Gunawoo to fall? Did the earth man possess the touch of death?

The wingmen retreated slowly, fearfully. They were victims of superstitions, like most primitive people. An unexplained event could easily be magnified in their imaginations. The tribal gods must be consulted before they plunged ahead with the attack.

The parents of Gooyay were more realistic. They had come to rescue their son. Their son's life was far more important than any general victory over the party of earth men. Gunawoo's plan had been to engage these strangers in open battle. He had had his own motives apart from the rescue of Gooyay. He had been spoiled by his taste of earth men's weapons, and as a result had had bright visions of capturing a large supply of the deadly, explosive guns.

But now Gunawoo lay still upon the ground with one wing bent under him. The retreating wingmen whispered, "His plan was not the plan of the gods," they decided. "We must consult the gods."

When the full blaze of the morning sun swept across the crest of the Thirteenth Finger, a conclave of wingmen assembled in the shadows beyond. From far around, the winged natives were called from their breakfasts of snail flesh to attend the discussion.

"What is to be done?" the parents of Gooyay asked patiently. "Is there a tribal leader among us who knows the will of the gods?"

THE aged leaders were ushered to the center of the circle—lame men with scarred faces and broken wing tips. The younger warriors listened respectfully while their elders talked. The sun climbed high. The waves of the ocean pounded ceaselessly against the shore. At length a course of action was agreed upon.

"If we surround them they cannot fly past us. They have no wings. We shall enclose them and wait. If they send a spokesman to us, we shall present our demands. We want Gooyay returned to us alive. And we want the body of Gunawoo."

"And what if they turn their deadly firearms upon us?"

"Then that will be the signal for us to fly at them and slaughter them without mercy. Some of us will be killed, but we shall win."

The aged spokesman made a sign to show that his words had the personal approval of the tribal gods. Then he limped out of the circle with his proud head held high. It was a memorable hour for the old chieftain, and his audience wondered if he would take to his wings to celebrate his triumph. No, his flying days were over. He would limp sadly back to his mountain lair. He had played his part.

It was late afternoon when the long line of wingmen moved down the east slope of the Thirteenth Finger. Panno and Latee, themselves, led the procession. They saw a few of the earth people running back to their caves and heard the alarmed shouts. They listened for the voice of Gooyay and once Latee was sure she heard his little voice in an outcry of excitement.

The line passed between the caves and the one great flying ship that was parked on the beach. Thus, the earth people were cut off from their one means of escape.

Two of the earth men, the doctor and a short fellow named Hefty, scurried back to camp just in time to avoid being closed out.

A whisper of warning ran through the ranks. There was the man who had shaken hands with Gunawoo at dawn. Beware of him. In his hand was the touch of death. For the mute evidence was still before their eyes. The body of Gunawoo had not been touched.

When the sun lowered over the line of mountains, a complete circle of wingmen surrounded the camp. They stood at ease, and there they would stand through the coming days and nights until their prisoners came to terms.

Hefty Winkle sprinted at top speed. There was no way of knowing what the

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wingmen intended. In such numbers they might pounce upon the earth party and fight without mercy.

IT WAS hard on Hefty's morale to have to run for his life. If he had been running at Stupe Smith's side he could have maintained his eternal faith that everything was happening for the best. For him, Stupe was a bulwark of strength. But now it was Dr. Jabetta who ran with him. The doctor was such a morose, mysterious person that, try as he would, Hefty could not feel a solid confidence in him.

"Which cave?" Hefty called.

"The farther one. All the supplies have been moved over there." Dr. Jabetta had taken charge more or less informally. A half an hour ago he had gone up the hillside to warn Hefty that the line of wingmen was forming.

"This is bad," Hefty panted. He might have expressed his fears more fully. He knew what the wingmen must be thinking. Here was the man who had caused the death of their leader somehow. The prestige from that event was being lost. No man with a sure grip on a magic power would be running away from danger.

They entered the larger cave, and turned to look back at the line of wingmen. Oddly enough, the attackers were standing at bay. They appeared to have no intention of moving up. Perhaps they would wait until dark.

"What has happened to Gooyay?" was Hefty's first question.

"S-S-Sh!" Thelma Stevens placed a restraining hand on his arm. "The little fellow is way back in the deep tunnel. Gypsy Brown has quieted him. She doesn't like to keep him tied up all the time, but you know what would happen if he looked out and saw this unholy nightmare."

"We'd better let him go. It may save us trouble in the long run. Don't you think so, Doctor?" Hefty asked. Dr. Jabetta held his silence. He was looking back at the row of wingmen as if fascinated by the myriad colors of their wings. No doubt he knew that they had recognized him.

"If there was any way to close the entrance to this cave, we'd have a fighting chance," said Hefty.

Thelma was tugging at his arm. "If we can go way back in, there'd be more chance We've found some new channels leading off from the narrow tunnel."

"Go ahead," said Dr. Jabetta. He was examining the hypodermic needle in his hand. "I'll stand guard."

For a moment, Hefty was undecided. Thelma pleaded with him to come on. He could hear the low echoes of voices from the rest of the party. They would need his leadership in the absence of Stupe.

He nodded, "Okay." He started. Then the doctor called him back.

"One word, Hefty." The doctor's voice lowered to a confidential tone. "There is something I want to tell you."

"Huh?"

"This might be our last chance to talk, you know," said the doctor. "If they come in on us—."

"I understand," said Hefty.

"All right, then here it is." The doctor drew a deep breath as if to divest himself of some weighty matter.

"WE'VE been sent up to this planet on false pretenses. And still—I don't know. I mean, it looks as if we might be on the right trail after all."

"I don't get you," said Hefty.

"A few nights ago I succeeded in making Captain Meetz *talk*. Confidentially, I doped him to loosen his tongue. What he revealed was worth knowing. He believes not one word of Mr. Vest's story about some phenomenal female who rides under the sea."

"Huh—I'll be damned." He had heard a similar story from Dick Bracket.

"You see, Wellington has an ulterior motive. All of this talk about a girl is simply a ruse. His real purpose was to make an excuse to send supplies—military supplies and everything else needed to undertake his own colonization."

Hefty's eyes widened. "His own? He must be an ambitious cuss."

The doctor nodded. That was it in a nutshell. The doctor had once tricked the Captain into revealing the whole inside

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plan and had learned that Stupendous Smith had been rung in on the deal simply to make it look authentic. "That million dollar award was simply bait for a sucker."

Hefty frowned and mopped his forehead. Dozens of questions leaped through his mind. He reached into his pocket for his letter which the girl had delivered to him only a few hours before.

"Something's haywire," said Hefty. "I wasn't dreaming when I received this." He twisted the letter in his fingers to be sure it was real. "I saw her. She rode so fast that the dust cloud liked to blinded me, and now you tell me—."

"That's the very point, Hefty," the doctor tapped him nervously on the shoulder. "As soon as we read your letter and found that it was from Stupe—as soon as we knew that he had seen this marvelous thing that we came to find—the whole picture was turned right side up again. Now, do you see? We've got to go through with it according to plan. Between us we've got to see that Stupe wins. Then Wellington will be the goat—not us."

Hefty hurried along the passage to overtake Thelma. She had been peevish over being left out of a confidential visit with the doctor, but she liked Hefty well enough to do the favor he asked. "You've got to help me," he said. "We will have to make Gypsy Brown understand. There's nothing to do but release her little winged prisoner—the sooner, the better."

"I don't think she'll do it," said Thelma. "She's stubborn, you know. She thinks she'll get her suitcase back eventually if she holds out."

"Her suitcase be damned," Hefty growled. "We have too much at stake to worry about a suitcase."

A FEW minutes later they overtook Gypsy. Hefty had to talk fast. It wasn't easy to argue against a headstrong person like the cook.

"Please, friend, *please!* You know how much this means to Stupe and all of us. We're not heading for a dead end now. We know that there is an undersea world. We have Stupe's letter to prove it. And the girl—I saw her with my own eyes. Are we going to let the whole game fall through just to help *you* get your revenge for a lost suitcase?"

"It vass a brand new zootcase," Gypsy said sadly, "but if you say so—."

"That's a pal, Gypsy, turn the little fellow loose—anything to get rid of this band of wingmen. Then we'll be free to go down to the sea . . ."

It all sounded so simple, so easy. Little Gooyay's parents were waiting for him outside, no doubt. If he would fly off to them, then the party of attackers would disband. Or would they?"

But there was one tiny flaw in the plan. The little winged rascal had out-distanced the rest of the earth party in his chase down through the tunnels.

"Vare iss he?" Gypsy asked one of the others.

"Gone on ahead," said Jake Fiddle in a sour voice.

"I'll try to find him," Thelma said.

Hefty followed along with her, combing the walls with his flashlight. Their voices echoed back to them as they called. The other members of the party gathered into one of the dark chambers from which several smaller passages branched outward in a fan-like formation. Thelma spread a blanket to catch a few moment's rest. Frenchy served sandwiches after dividing them with his knife.

"Vare iss he?" Gypsy wailed.

The flashlight beam searched the floor and revealed a small, orange feather pointing toward one of the passages.

"He went that way," said Hefty.

"Playing games, iss he?" Gypsy waggled her head to express her disappointment in her adopted son.

There was nothing to do but follow the blind trail. A few minutes later they came upon another feather. The little fellow was playing a game all right, stripping his wings to make a trail for them.

"The rest of you had better go on back," said Hefty. "I'll find him and be back soon."

Thelma agreed that that was best. "If we get a chance we'll let his parents know." There was worry in her voice. "I do hope everything will be all right."

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And Gypsy Brown added with a note of terror, "Do be careful, Hefty. If you go lost, dot vould be awful. Come back soon or ve'll vollow you."

CHAPTER XL

BENEATH the amber light Stupendous Smith studied the pages of the aged book. Its hand-written script was at first mystifying to him, but with the key which Zaleena-Zaleese explained to him, he was able to read. The bright black letters glinted with edges of gold as he bent the thick pages in his hands.

Ancient mysteries . . . the heritage of some half forgotten deity . . . the forecast of innumerable faiths . . . the prediction of a sinking city . . .

"I shall leave you to study these pages," said the goddess.

The hours passed swiftly. In his mind's eye Stupe saw many pictures. He was not sure how much of his vision was evoked by the words on the printed page or how much was the drifting of his own imagination. Around him the purple lights glowed softly. Overhead the concentric circles of amber became dimmer and dimmer. The page was no longer visible. Before his eyes there passed a succession of figures—the long, long trail of Venusian humanity. Strange creatures, different breeds of animals and men. Some of the finest human specimens that could be imagined, walking tall across the plains of Venus; some malformed, wretched and misshapen, being lost at the end of the trail.

As he watched their timeless progress, he listened to the whisper of the Spirit which guided their destiny.

At first he was scarcely aware of its presence. It was like a steaming cloud, drifting high above them. They, the forebears of the present generation of Venusians, were being protected by this overhanging "cloud." Then, to his amazement, he saw that their lines were divided at the upper reaches of a valley so that one group followed toward the crest of the mountain. Wings appeared on the backs of these creatures, tiny at first, then expanding in breadth until a race of winged men emerged from the summit and took flight. Another group moved along the bank of the river, stopping to build villages —crude at first, then more complicated until the supreme achievements of modern civilization began to emerge.

There were other branches from the unwinding stems of animal life. Some seemingly unfortunate creatures were doomed to crawl. They accumulated a hardness of texture that would protect them against the stones of the mountainside. Their backs formed into shells. They were sluggish, snail-like creatures larger than men but without the direction of any human intelligence.

AS THIS pageant unfolded before Stupe's half closed eyes, he was fascinated by the guiding hand of the Spirit. Cloud that it was, it was evidently a thing omniscient. To each it gave according to the individual's ability to receive. The touch of its steamy fingers blessed all creatures as they passed. But as this Spirit reached down from the sky, it bestowed one gift more precious than all the others. This gift was a tangible thing—a jewelled object which Stupe saw to be a harpoon. This picture so fascinated him that he attempted to draw it closer. He himself, seeemd to be moving in space toward it. It grew larger and larger, its rubies and emeralds shining through the misty cloud until it was immediately before him.

Then he saw a hand reach up to accept this precious gift. He recognized the hand —that of Zaleena-Zaleese.

He gazed, and the amber light above him grew stronger and his eyes opened. The goddess was indeed beside him and in her hand was the harpoon.

"Oh, have you been waiting?" Stupe asked. "I must have dozed. I was dreaming."

The goddess smiled, "It is always like a dream when you read from this ancient book. Did you see the Spirit?"

"You mean the cloud that reached down with steamy fingers?"

"That is the Spirit which bestowed upon me the gift of a beautiful life." She closed

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the book gently, and took his hand. "Now that you have read, there are many more things that I can tell you. Come."

They walked leisurely to the balcony, past the throne where the Old Man was dozing, and stopped at the railing to look down upon the star-shaped city.

"There are two kinds of deities, you know," she said quietly, and waited for his response.

"Two kinds?" he echoed, and his hand automatically tightened over her fingers. If there were other goddesses in this realm, he would feel an instinctive jealousy toward them. To be close to Zaleena-Zaleese was having a deep effect upon him. With every passing hour this attraction for her had grown, and likewise his reverence of her. He had met her as a person, but gradually he was coming to accept her as a deity.

"Two kinds of gods?" he repeated.

"There are the gods which *men create,*" she said, "and they are very useful too. You have only to turn and glance at the throne to see what I mean."

STUPE turned his eyes toward the sleeping old man, head bowed, long white beard spread thin over the front of his blue coat, hands drooping over the arm of his throne.

"Are you aware that the people have made a god of him?" the goddess asked. "After his grandfather's death, he became a symbol. His grandfather made the walls. Now he keeps watch over them. The people firmly believe that *no flood will ever destroy this city as long as the Old Man is alive.*"

"A god of eternal safety," mused Stupe.

"That is what they believe. But if the Old Man should die, I fear their religion will suffer a cruel shock."

Stupe looked at her searchingly. "What do *you* believe?"

She did not answer directly. Something was worrying her, and he waited for her to explain these mysteries in her own way.

"Do you remember something I whispered to you in your dreams?" she asked.

"I remember something pretty terrible," he said. "You once whispered that you were supposed to become the wife of the Old Man, or something like that."

"Understand me, please," she said slowly. "This is neither his idea nor mine, but the wish of the people. They wish it because it would promise them eternal safety."

"I don't understand."

"I have been given the rarest gift which the Spirit has to offer. I am a goddess because of that gift. The greatest deity of Venus, the guiding hand of our creation, has appointed me. This," she indicated the jewelled harpoon, "is the symbol of my gift."

"And the gift?"

"Is *youth eternal.* Upon me and upon the White Stallion that bears me through the waters has been bestowed the blessing of eternal youth!"

Stupe felt his throat tighten. He was keenly aware of the magnetism that played into his hand from the touch of her fingertips. In awe he drew away from her. How did he dare to share the slightest intimacy with her if, indeed, she were a person charmed with such a blessing?

"Now you know how it is," she said, "that I can ride through fire and water with no fear of death . . . My people know . . . They depend upon me to use my birthright in their behalf. This much I am willing to do."

STUPE sensed a reservation in her statement. Were they asking her for favors beyond her power to give?

"They believe, however," she went on, "that I have the means to *share my gift with the ones I choose for a mate.* Now do you see their plan for me?"

Her glance toward the sleeping Old Man made her meaning clear.

"You mean—" Stupe looked from the throne to the stone-glass wall.

"Yes. *For their safety they wish him to live on forever. They believe that if I marry him—*"

She stopped abruptly, and turned her face away from him. She was suddenly walking away and he knew that she was weeping.

"Dudu!" he called, "Dudu, come back

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to me."

She stopped, and turned, her eyes smiling through the mist of tears.

"We'll not let this happen, Dudu," he said, taking her in his arms. She looked up at him questionably, waiting for him to say more. His thoughts flashed back through the weird course of events that had brought him here. "I've come a long, long way, Dudu," he said, kissing her eyelids tenderly, "I must have come for some purpose."

She clung to his arms, and spoke in the imploring voice of eternal youth.

"Take me back with you . . . Wherever you came from, take me back to your land . . . Soon, please . . . Will you? . . . Will you promise?"

CHAPTER XLI

THE committee which assisted Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu in governing the city under the sea had grown impatient with her delays. They had expected to stage a beautiful pageant in honor of the Old Man and his many years of guardianship over their safety. They had urged Zaleena that, in the interests of perpetuating the present idyllic state of affairs, she should make this celebration memorable by marrying the man they honored.

By one device or another, Zaleena had succeeded in delaying them.

"We should first find a foreigner to offer as a sacrifice," she had once suggested, "in order to follow the dictates of the ancient ritual of . . ;" and she had quoted long passages from the ancient volume of mysteries in support of her argument.

This subterfuge had been good for many days of delay. But the appearance of Stupe Smith had led her to regret the remark. Stupe had come, and she had fallen in love with him at once. He was young, strong and handsome. He was an interesting talker, full of marvelous ideas about some remote world. His numbers did not stop at ten but went all the way up to sixty thousand and even farther, he said.

She did not question why he had come or how long he would stay. He was willing to be received as her guest. That was all she could ask. But because of her earlier statement to the committee, she now lived in hourly fear that his identity as a foreigner would be discovered.

Her servants could be trusted. The Egg Inspector was too stupid to catch on. The gentle Old Man would never reveal a secret that meant new happiness for Zaleena for he loved her dearly.

But now the six committeemen marched across the passage from the Old Man's throne to her wall-side palace to talk with her.

She met them in the reception room, and asked them to be seated, offering to serve refreshments.

FROM the next room, Stupe Smith listened. Some of the voices were strident. Things were going badly of late.

"The wall has been patched four times since that unaccountable explosion."

"I followed the foreigner who escaped our guards," said Zaleena, trying to soothe their nerves. "He found his way back to the mainland. We will not be bothered by him again."

The committeemen voiced their doubts. They would feel much safer if they could be sure the Old Man would live on forever.

Then the goddess said something that horrified them. "Must you assume that I will be with you always? *Perhaps I have other plans.*"

Stupe's blood froze. He could imagine the surprised reaction. Some of those whispered exclamations were, undoubtedly, blasphemies. How far did a goddess dare go, he wondered, in stirring the wrath of her people?

Stupe wished he could have prepared Zaleena for this emergency. A few rash words might cost her much needless trouble. Such impulsiveness, he thought. She was already paving the way for a trip to his country. But how did *he* dare plan such a trip?

Always in his mind was the thought of bringing her back to J. J. Wellington. An ugly prospect. "Here you are, Mr. Wellington, an attraction from Venus that will make your night club crowds go wild with

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delight," he could hear himself saying. "One million dollars, please, Mr. Wellington. Sign on the dotted line. She and the horse are all yours."

"I could never do it," Stupe muttered, half aloud. "But suppose she insists on going with me. Suppose I can't talk her out of my promise? Could I possibly smuggle her into America without Wellington's knowing? No, even if we hid away in Europe or South America the word would get out . . ."

Again he listened. The members of the committee were leaving. They were talking loud, not so much in anger as in nervous fear, Stupe thought. The city depended upon them for its welfare. The gods help them if Zaleena-Zaleese failed to give them the protection they needed.

"Let us proceed with the celebration in honor of the Old Man as early as possible," one of the councilmen said.

"Within three days," said Zaleena.

"And the wedding too?"

"I shall give you my decision soon," said the goddess. "Good day, gentlemen."

"One further point," said one of the men. "Sometime ago you quoted an ancient ritual that referred to a sacrifice."

"It may be overlooked," she said hastily.

The councilman was not to be put off so easily. "I think a sacrificial victim is hiding in our midst. If we do the Old Man more honor by torturing and killing one of his lesser brothers, let us ferret out this foreigner who is among us. Do you agree, Zaleena?"

Stupe waited tensely for the girl's answer, but one of the other councilmen spoke ahead of her.

"I think we can soon find this outsider. The Inspector's assistant is said to be a stranger. Someone pointed him out to me. He stands a little straighter than we, and is quicker in the motions of his arms. I shall watch for him."

"Yes, do," said the goddess in a tight voice. "Good day, gentlemen."

THEY trudged away, talking in hearty voices of their plans for the big public celebration. "A pageant . . . Zaleena on her white horse . . . The basket throne to be lowered . . ."

Their voices faded out of hearing. The goddess hurried back to Stupe and clutched his hands in hers.

"It's dreadful," she said. "I was miserable through every minute of their visit. You heard?"

"Practically everything," said Stupe.

"Oh, why did the Spirit ever choose to make me a goddess over these people? Was it not foreseen that I would come to this humiliation?"

"Don't be upset, please, Zaleena."

"I even threatened to betray them. At least they will think so. But I didn't mean it that way, believe me."

Stupe tried to comfort her. She was demonstrating all of the human qualities of any other person. It was not right, Stupe thought, for such a beautiful person to be so unhappy.

"You don't really mean to desert them in time of need, do you?" he said, leading her into her study.

Her answer was indirect and full of mystery.

"You are very kind, Stupe Smith," she said. "You are kind to everybody. *But you do not understand my motive. You have not read all of the mysteries of this book. If I leave these people—if I go to your land—*"

"Yes, go on."

"Never mind," she said. "I am not entirely sure you would want me to go. There is some doubt lurking in your mind."

Stupe took her searching gaze with his steady eyes. He nodded slowly. She was right. He did have misgivings. Here she was a goddess with power over a people who loved her and depended upon her. But if she went back with him to the world of J. J. Wellington, what would she become?

"Come," he said smiling. "Let's go and talk the whole thing over frankly with the Old Man."

Zaleena gave a surprised laugh. "I was just going to suggest the same thing."

Lightheartedly they slipped through the palace and across the elevated path to the throne above the city. Eternal Youth! Zaleena's Spirit-gift was a contagious quality. Stupe was learning to break from his

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serious moods into momentary gayety.

"Prepare for the worst, and hope for the best, as we used to say in my land far away," Stupe said, trying to throw off his self-consciousness.

Prepare for the worst? Neither Zaleena nor Stupe was prepared for the shocking thing they discovered when they ascended the steps of the balcony throne.

"Wake up, Old Man . . . Wake up . . . Wake . . . What's the matter with him? His hands are cold."

"Dead," said Zaleena quietly. "In his sleep Death has overtaken him."

CHAPTER XLII

FOR a long while the two of them stood in respectful silence. He had been a grand Old Man, a deity by the grace of men's belief in him. Now he had slipped away from the world of the living, as all mortals must do at sometime.

At once Stupe knew that Zaleena's difficulties had bounded out of hand. What could she do? The wall, in spite of successive patches was still leaking. The people were complaining that spots around the new patch were allowing slow streams of water to seep in.

But for their superstitious faith in the Old Man, the whole city would be in a panic at this very moment. A stampede of any sort would probably cost several lives.

"They mustn't know," Stupe said. "Not yet."

Zaleena's eyelids flickered rapidly. She walked down the steps to the balcony level, took one glance at the quiet city below her, then called across to a servant on an adjoining bridge.

"Will you please take a message to the committee for me? . . . Tell them this: In three days when the celebration is held, I shall be wedded to the Old Man."

CHAPTER XLIII

IT ALL happened quietly and swiftly. Only a few of Zaleena's trusted servants knew. They assisted her with the delicate operation of cutting off the Old Man's white hair, bushy eyebrows and flowing beard. Then, they buried him at sea, and they mourned in private through the hour of dawn.

It was a bold plan. There was no time to waste. Zaleena's own skilled fingers did most of the work, a few servants assisting. Stupe Smith lay back in his chair beneath the white light as they worked on him. The long, white whiskers that had belonged to the Old Man were being painstakingly glued to his face.

Stupe, henceforth, must be the Old Man.

"It is the only way," Zaleena said over and over. "You must play the part."

Stupe was on pins and needles. His furtive eyes watched the reactions of the make-up artists as they worked on his face. Little by little they were accomplishing their purpose with him.

"The irony of it," he thought. "The goddess of eternal youth loves me, and so she makes an Old Man of me."

When at last a mirror was set before him, Stupe was astonished and delighted to discover how he had been transformed.

Zaleena, having pledged her helpers to secrecy, led Stupe at once to the balcony throne. Henceforth he would guard the spiral stairs that led to the sea platform overhead.

Mirrors were placed in his small throne room to enable him to practice the mannerisms of the Old Man. He experimented with his voice until he learned to speak slowly and with the little quaver of age in his tones.

"You are so good a substitute that I am not sure you were ever Stupe Smith," said Zaleena, running her fingers through his white hair.

"I may be an Old Man," he said, "but remember you are still Dudu to me."

She bent to kiss him, in spite of his long beard. Her action was interrupted by the footsteps of an official messenger bounding up the six steps that lead to the throne room.

"Begging your pardon," said the messenger. Stupe's fingers twitched nervously on the arm of his massive chair. This was his first test before the eyes of his subjects.

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THE messenger had come to speak to Zaleena of the rumor concerning the wedding. The news, spreading swiftly through the city, was a signal for rejoicing.

"Now the undercurrents of fear will melt away," the messenger said. "The people know that your marriage to the Old Man will guarantee long life to him. He will live on, and our walls will be safe."

Stupe held his breath. The messenger's simple faith was touching. But Stupe and Zaleena were standing on the brink of disaster. One word, one slip could shatter the faith of this man and all his people.

Stupe kept nodding slowly, just as the Old Man would have done. The messenger gave him only a few kindly glances, concentrating most of his attention upon Zaleena—and the mirrors. Curiously enough, the mirrors, giving back to the messenger his own reflection from several angles, performed a helpful function. He was unconsciously distracted by these images of himself so that he did not scrutinize the features of the "Old Man" as Stupe had feared he would do.

"With your permission," the messenger said, "the people would like to begin their celebration at once and continue through the hour of the wedding."

Zaleena turned to Stupe. He knew her thoughts. She was grieving inwardly over the loss of the Old Man, and could never endure two days of merry-making. It would be all the two of them could do to carry on with their awful deception.

She turned the question to him. "How would you answer the messenger?"

Stupe's throat tightened. He spoke in an uneven voice, gesturing slowly with his trembling hand.

"Have the people look to their walls," he said. "The flow of water must be stopped completely. Let the workmen try once more to build a stronger patch."

THE messenger bowed, swallowed his disappointment, and hurried away to report the wishes of these deities.

"Well done, Old Man," Zaleena said softly, taking Stupe's hand. Then he saw that she was weeping. "Don't worry, little goddess," he said. "We'll come through somehow."

For many minutes he comforted her. She was so very human, so full of human weaknesses, that in this dark hour she believed she had never deserved the gift of a goddess. Had she the will to go on with this desperate plan of deception?

"The worst is already over," said Stupe. "If your servants will keep our secret, and if you will not make any public appearances too difficult, no one will ever know."

She smiled. "Thank you, Stupe Smith. It's much easier being a goddess with you to lean upon."

He gave her a comical wink. "The joker in your bargain is that you're going to have to marry me. Have you stopped to think of that?"

She looked away, and her shining dark eyes were wistful as she said, "You needn't feel that you are really married to me, you know. After all, we're only doing this so our people will believe—"

She didn't get to finish for Stupe quickly drew her into his arms and said, almost fiercely, "Dudu, you can't dodge me that way. You and I are going to be married, and I mean married."

He brushed his white beard out of the way so that he could kiss her as convincingly as possible under the circumstances.

There was mischief in her eyes as she said, "You're not behaving at all like an Old Man . . . but I think I'm going to like being married to you."

CHAPTER XLIV

FROM South America to New York to the Southeast Ocean of Venus, a rambling pattern of Stupendous Smith's activities spread wide and deep.

There were many people in the Andes who remembered the unrecognized heroism of Smith's rescue expedition from many months before.

Through America and Europe many comfortable arm-chair travelers mused over chance items in the travel magazines and paused at the name of "Stupendous" Smith.

"So he's gone to Venus with some sort

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of exploring party," they might say. "Wonder what he'll find up there?" or "I hope he gets his dues this time. It seemed to me the newspapers never gave him full credit for the fine work he did down in South America."

Avid readers of the gossip columns in Boston or Los Angeles might have commented too. "Well, of all things. Here it says Mae Krueger has gone along with her husband on a Venus expedition. Now there's a juicy item. You know she's the only girl Stupe Smith ever fell for, and he's in Venus too."

Such trifles of gossip meant nothing to the pompous Mr. Wellington. In his mind's eye, the new empire was at last taking shape. Word had come back from Venus that the American Ambassador was proving no match for the diverse machinations of his two expeditions. The Ambassador's activities had, of necessity, been limited to sending out scouting parties and forwarding their reports to Washington.

"They'll wake up in Washington some bright morning," Wellington said to his personal staff of assistants, "to discover there's already a Wellington flag flying over the upper half of a continent."

Somewhere in England the eccentric little Mr. Vest lectured to a group of professors. He climaxed his remarks with, "Gentlemen, I have told you these experiences without exaggeration or restraint. And let me add that my story of the strange phenomenon of Venus has been told only once before, in strictest confidence. J. J. Wellington based his expeditions to Venus upon this story, and as long as he acted in good faith this knowledge remained exclusively his. But now—well, Mr. Wellington has misused my information for certain unethical purposes. His changed attitude has killed my confidence in him. You, gentlemen, I want you to know these facts. If they are of any use to the world of science, please make the most of them."

"It sounds like a figment of Mr. Vest's imagination," one of the professors commented afterward, "but I never say yes or no to any theory until I have examined the evidence. I propose we send a delegation to this Mr. Wellington of America and ask him to make public the findings of his two expeditions . . ."

ON THE planet of Venus at the American Embassy, Ambassador Jewell looked out upon the space port, and pondered the ills of the world. The American Government would have to appropriate more money for its interplanetary stations if it expected to keep tab on all of these pioneers of space.

The second Wellington party had come like an eager prize fighter stepping into the ring, and had hardly taken time to shake hands. Its leader, Captain Sam Krueger, must have had his plans for swift action all set. While he and his attractive red-haired wife were politely dining with the ambassador, at noon an official from the space port tiptoed into the dining room and whispered, "Mr. Jewell, they have not allowed us to inspect their goods. They appear to be all set to move on without unloading."

The ambassador paled as he turned to his guests. "Is there any reason why the official inspection of your equipment shouldn't take place at once?"

Krueger, a wide shouldered man with a hard jaw and thick curly hair, gave a solid gesture of approval. "Let 'em do their worst, Ambassador. Hell, yes, tell 'em to go ahead."

But his wife had touched the Ambassador's arm with her graceful fingers. "My, is time so precious on this planet that we can't wait until we have finished this delightful dinner? Your officials must have been reared in the subway."

Ambassador Jewell smiled politely, and said that the inspection could wait until after dinner.

After dinner he was drawn into an unexpected conference concerning the wingmen that seemed too important to be delayed. A wingman had brought back a suitcase which one of his fellows had evidently stolen. This gesture of honesty might mean much in the promotion of peace between the races. The ambassador devoted twenty minutes to the conference, and in his absence, the new Wellington

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party dashed away.

"Here's Krueger's note," an official said, "Their spaceship was all set for an after-dinner air cruise. Krueger said he wanted to get a bird's eye view of the planet yet this afternoon."

"Of all the ill manners!" The Ambassador's comment was a masterpiece of understatement.

The following day several of the ambassador's picked scouts returned in their midget planes to report that the new air-cruising space ship was planting small batches of military supplies at various strategic points over the continent. Ambassador Jewell went to bed with a raging headache.

AT THE beach beyond the Thirteenth Finger the circle of wingmen grew weary of their stalemated siege. Many hours had passed since they had taken up their position around the mountainside caverns.

On the first night they had broken ranks and carried the body of Gunawoo into the mountains for burial.

The parents of little Gooyay had ventured in another direction. They had approached the mouth of the cave cautiously, found no one there, had waited, listening. Finally they called softly. No answer. Panno wanted to venture in, but Latee dissuaded him.

"We had better stay with the tribe. They have come all this distance to help us. We must not do anything contrary to their plan."

"We shall wait until morning."

Then the two of them had returned sorrowfully to the ranks that were reforming around the cave. The hours of waiting passed slowly. . . .

Meanwhile Dr. Jabetta had groped through the long, dark tunnel in search of the rest of the party. His sunset vigil at the mouth of the cave, with a deadly hypodermic needle ready, had ended with the coming of darkness. By then he had guessed that the wingmen did not intend to attack. Their attitude was that of patient waiting.

He had gathered up all the food supplies he could carry, and had retreated into the tunnels.

Occasionally he stopped to hide part of the supplies as his load grew too heavy. Now and then he came upon a sign that reassured him—an arrow cut in the wall, a foot print in the wet clay, or an orange colored feather that pointed the way ahead.

Down and down the path led, and often the descent was steep. A subterranean river had flowed through this channel on its way to the sea. Waterfalls, eddies, sharp twists and turns marked its now-deserted course.

"Voices!" the doctor said from time to time. "Voices! I must be getting nearer . . . Why did they go so far?"

If gravity had not been with them, they certainly would not have travelled such a distance. But an errant little winged boy had set the pace for them, and he had followed the line of least resistance. The doctor couldn't help wondering how one of the Stevens girls had kept pace on such a rough path. Her recent illness would tell on her. They shouldn't have allowed her to go so far.

"Did that little winged cuss know where he was leading them?" the doctor wondered. "Does he know a way out of this, or is he playing a devil of a trick on everybody including himself?"

Then, "Voices! Voices!"

But the voices materialized as a gurgling waterfall. The tiny underground stream echoed among the stalactities and stalagmites like the laughter of children.

Water was welcome. The doctor drank deeply, rested a moment while he flashed the light over the foot tracks on the clay floor, and then hurried on.

An hour later the voices became a reality. He found almost all of the party huddled together, cold, damp and weary, in a dark cavern chamber.

"Ve vere so scared," Gypsy Brown said sleepily, "We thought you vould be dead bevore ve turned der vourth corner."

"The fourth corner is a long way back," said the doctor.

"You are telling us!"

"Are you all here?"

"All but Hefty. He iss still on der

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chase. Dot leedle vinged scamperbug, he keeps six chumps ahead, right down der line!"

CHAPTER XLV

THE "basket" was like an immense red and yellow flower pot, large enough that Stupe could stand in the center, rest his hands on the ornamented rim, and look out at the assemblage of undersea citizens.

The basket was lowered from the overhead balcony by cables. Stupe moved down with it slowly, his heart pounding, his fingers tight upon the curved sides. The hour had come for him to make his first public appearance in the guise of the Old Man.

Fully ten thousand people, dressed in their most colorful holiday costumes, waved to him as he slowly descended. He brushed his white beard casually, as the Old Man might have done. The first words of his speech were waiting on the tip of his tongue. The basket began to sway a little, and its slow pendulum effect caused the thousands of faces, upturned against the light, to move back and forth in slow rhythm.

He glanced toward the upper walls. The new patch was fully one hundred and twenty feet in width. The Inspector had been working overtime, it was rumored, to make sure all of the Eggs were in good condition. Were the people secure in their faith that the Old Man could insure them against disaster? Stupe wondered.

In spite of the new patch, the water was still seeping in slowly. Seven long ribbons of seepage stretched from the lower edges of the patch to the ground level several hundred feet below. Pools of water had formed in the yards of the residents who lived on the outer rim of the city.

"Have those stone-glass patches always worked?" Stupe had asked Zaleena earlier. "Can we be sure that we are safe? Shouldn't we try experimenting with some new materials?"

Zaleena had not known what to answer. She was afraid that any change of materials would shatter the confidence of the engineers. "I don't understand . . . Do you suppose the Old Man's death is responsible?"

Stupe preferred to believe that the explosion had caused some sort of decay to eat its way through the stone-glass. Still, he wondered . . . To what extent could the superstititions of these people be trusted?

"Does the Spirit have any answers for you?" he had asked her. "If we should read more from the book would some vision of help come to us?"

ZALEENA-ZALEESE had led him, then, to the study table beneath the amber light, and had turned the thick pages slowly.

"Take me away soon, Stupe. Take me away from this world, back to your own country." That was all she would say.

Now as he descended to speak to the vast crowd assembled before him, these thoughts weighed down upon him. Disaster hovered over the city. The gods had played false with these people.

Did gods *deserve* to be gods, he wondered, when they had made people remain in a city even though it had sunk into the sea? These superstitious citizens had believed this spot to be sacred. And through the past decades, as the coastline sank rapidly, they had clung fanatically to their chosen soil.

Did a goddess deserve to be a goddess— This question weighed upon Stupe's conscience like lead.

Did a goddess deserve to be a goddess when, with human weakness, she begged to run away from her people in the face of disaster?

The basket came to a stop above the pond in the center of the star-shaped city. Cables were caught from below, so that its pendulum action was stilled. Stupe looked out upon the wide paved plaza. Ropes held the crowds back to make room for the pageant of dignitaries.

The artists had outdone themselves to prepare a colorful pageant for this occasion. The committee of six appeared at the head of the parade, dressed in their starchiest black and white suits adorned with epaulets of red and yellow wing

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feathers. They marched slowly, smiling with dignified restraint to their favorites among the crowd. When they came face to face with the "Old Man" they bowed stiffly, then moved on to their seats at the edge of the plaza.

They were followed by a band of little children looking gay in their costumes of pink and yellow seashells. Undoubtedly they had been given a last minute curtain lecture, for they were being watched by their leaders and reprimanded by slight signals whenever they exchanged excited whispers.

Several of the leaders of city industries and civic activities followed along in turn. The Inspector himself was the most conspicuous among these, partly because of his huge bulk, partly because of his outrageously funny costume—a purple suit with immense yellow polka dots. Always the exhibitionist, he waved gaily to the crowd. But his reception was not as wholehearted as he might have expected. Many faces turned quickly from him to glance at the distant wall where seven streams of water glided down.

AT THE end of the procession came Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu, riding the white stallion, Marble Boy. She was escorted by eighteen youths who marched in groups of threes. They were dressed in uniforms of brown and orange, with creamy white sashes that matched the brilliant white of the stallion. Stupe liked the way they held their heads as if inspired by the proud carriage of the goddess they honored. Too many citizens of this hidden city went about with heads bowed and shoulders humped, Stupe had noticed. Perhaps it was the effect of working in the low-tunneled mines that branched out beneath the ocean's floor.

Stupe waited until everyone was seated. His turn had come at last. It was almost perfectly quiet throughout the city. Perhaps you could not have heard a pin drop because there was always the low echo of winds from the open mine shafts near the city walls. Then, too, today there was the unusual gurgling of waters, gliding from the streets into one of the open shafts—a cheerful sound, yet ominous. It was Stupe's duty to reassure these people against a flood while these very sounds of the spilling sea competed against his voice.

"Citizens of the undersea world," began Stupe in the aged and cracked voice of the Old Man, "You have remained here through many generations because you *believe*—" he changed the words hastily—"because you *know* that this area is *sacred*. The gods have asked you to remain here. They have promised you everlasting prosperity as long as your faith in them holds fast. Today you have come to honor me, not because I, alone, am responsible for the walls which safeguard you, but because I am a symbol of the one who assisted you when the sea rose high around you."

He drew a deep breath. He felt that he was about to set forth in words a falsehood that would blacken his conscience the rest of his life. He must say it with all the force he could muster.

"I have come before you to reassure you—" For some reason his eyes were diverted toward the wall momentarily. He thought that he had detected some movement there. He counted the streams that were flowing downward. Seven? No, eight. A new one had appeared!

"I have come to reassure you that you are *safe*." His voice cracked. "That you will *always* be—"

His eyes again turned toward the wall, as if magnetically drawn. *But instantly two unseen hands pressed against his cheeks to turn his head away.*

In that moment Stupe was enveloped in a white mist. His words were choked off. The Spirit had entered in the form of a cloud, and everyone saw . . .

CHAPTER XLVI

THROUGH the coils of lavender mist, Stupe looked out upon the sea of faces. The light from overhead filtered down in pink and orange shafts, moving slowly with the twists and turns of the cloud.

No one knew where it had come from. Stupe in his confusion tried to remember. He thought it had grown out of the huge gray patch on the wall. But it had also

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formed around him at the same time, for it was at this very second that his speech had been cut short and his eyes had been diverted from the wall.

The pressure against his cheeks was cool, like wet velvet, yet undeniably strong. The touch was ridged with fingers. The fingers glided over his cheeks and crossed his lips and pressed against his throat.

He was shocked by his own helplessness. The crowd had been waiting expectantly for his next words. His promise of safety had been bluntly posed and had not been driven home with enough conviction.

However, to his great relief, the people were no longer watching him. Their eyes were roving to catch the beauty of the shifting lines of light and shadow. This was their god, the Spirit, reaching down with ten thousand mist-like hands to bless each of them.

If there were whispers of confidence to each, Stupe could not hear them. Yet, from the low rustle of sounds and from the lighted expressions on the faces before him, he was led to wonder whether each person present was not receiving an individual communication.

In his own ears the one word, "Patience," sounded. And so he waited, watching.

A low roar of thunder rumbled through the vast circular shell. Stupe trembled. The walls must have quivered, he thought. His ears were attuned to every sound. Somehow he expected the crackle of stone-glass and the crash and splash of an angry sea leaping in through a bursting patch. But again there was only the low whisper, "Patience."

Then his basket began to turn slowly, and the light around him had become a dense purple, so that he felt the protection of darkness from the eyes of the throng.

ONE shaft of creamy white light blazed down through the mist upon the goddess, sitting like a statue upon the back of the white stallion. The animal was poised, alert, its pink nostrils distended with the excitement of this weird moment.

The girl's arms extended slowly, her palms reaching in an attitude of accepting the will of the Spirit that was speaking to her. Stupe was sure that never in his life would he see a more impressive picture—a rare combination of beauty and power and something mystical that he could not fathom.

The shaft of light edged slowly toward the pond beneath Stupe's basket. As it moved, the goddess and her mount moved with it. She was riding slowly across the plaza . . . across the surface of the water . . . and Stupe was simultaneously being lowered. The shaft of light was upon him too, and he felt the warmth of its blaze filtering through the locks of snowy white hair that covered his head.

To the audience, Zaleena and the Old Man were now side by side. She, the embodiment of youth and beauty, was about to be wedded to the white bearded old foreigner who symbolized wisdom and protection.

It was the low whispering thunder from the surrounding cloud that wedded them. The words in themselves were not distinguishable to Stupe, yet he knew their meaning.

Zaleena-Zaleese extended her hand to him. He saw the false lines of gray that had been painted on his own wrist—the color of old age. But the pounding, surging fever of youth was in his touch as his fingers closed over Dudu's.

The shaft of light from overhead moved down. Darkness crowded in above it, and the whole city was enshrouded in a deep opaque purple. Only a singing *sphere* of light was still visible, large enough to hover over Dudu and Stupe. Then it became a swirl of colors, a hundred spinning colors that enveloped the two of them for one long breath-taking moment, and it was gone.

The enclosed city was lost in total darkness.

"Dudu," Stupe whispered.

"Yes, Stupe, I am here . . . I am yours now. We are husband and wife, now, Stupe."

In the darkness Stupe kissed her and held her tightly. They were being lifted, he knew. He could hear the hoofs of the stallion, splashing through the pond and

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on to the pavement of the plaza. But Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu was with him in the basket, rising with him toward the unseen balcony eight hundred feet above the city.

"Listen," she whispered. "The Spirit is revealing to them a secret that concerns us."

The darkness was broken by a yellow flash of lightning that leaped around the walls. A flare of brilliance, the sharp crackle of electricity and then, once again, the return of the purple mist.

This time it was like an encircling wreath.

The whispering voice which had once spoken the word, "Patience!" now echoed softly from wall to wall.

"The Spirit which guided your fathers and their fathers before you comes to you again in this hour of danger."

A pause. Dudu huddled close in Stupe's arms, waiting.

"What the Spirit has revealed to your fathers and their fathers before you, it now reveals to you. It is not the ocean that weighs you down. It is your deities."

Another pause. Then—

"It is we, your gods, who weigh you down. If you would be lifted, why not bid us leave?"

CHAPTER XLVII

"AT LAST!" said Hefty Winkle. The little runaway, winged boy had just come running back from the tunnel into his arms. "At last, you little rascal. Don't you know I have been chasing you for days? What do you mean by running away from us?"

Little Gooyay was not ready with an answer. In the glow of Hefty's flashlight, the excitement in the little fellow's eyes shone too brightly. "What's the matter?" Hefty said, changing his tone. "Are you scared? Never mind, I'll not scold you. We'll go back to your Aunt Gypsy and let her talk to you."

The lad was reluctant to move. He was frightened, all right. He clung to Hefty's arm, his hands quivering.

"Out with it, pal. Give, give. Did you run into a den of snakes or something?"

The little voice piped, "It was the thunder. Thunder and lightning—it always scares me."

"Thunder and lightning? You're talking through your hat."

"And the funny lights," Gooyay went on. "Everywhere it was purple. Then the girl on the white horse rode up to the man."

"Huh?" Hefty was suddenly on nerve's edge. "Where did you see any such thing?"

The urchin pointed down the tunnel. "It's all light down there now," he said. "It's a big city with walls all around."

"M-m-m. Maybe you and I had better take a walk, Gooyay."

Several minutes later they came upon the sight which the little winged boy had described. There was no thunder or lightning; this Hefty took to be the child's imagination. But the city was there, solid and in three dimensions and *enclosed.* Hefty's heart was in his throat. He seemed to have walked out of one world and into another.

At first glimpse, the fantastic beauty of the place overwhelmed him. Dizzily he groped along the wall, keeping his hand tightened over Gooyay's. Then remembering his long and all but fruitless chase, he decided to take more adequate precautions before there was another runaway. With the bit of rope that dangled from Gooyay's waist he did have a satisfactory leash on the lad. He tied the end to his own belt.

"Now, Buddy, we are ready to do a little exploring. Not long ago I received a letter from someone down here—a guy named Stupe—but never mind, you wouldn't understand."

THEY edged along the wall toward a paved street which came to a point at the outer fringe of the city. They could hear the voices of persons who were clustered in front of their residences, and as Hefty peeked around the side of the building to catch his first view of these underworld people, his fears diminished. They were human beings like himself. They

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appeared to be so much concerned with their own interests that he saw no reason to fear them.

"This way," he said to Gooyay. "Let's get an earful of their talk." He soon gathered that they had recently attended some very important public meeting which was having its aftermath in their excited comments.

"It was perfect except for one thing," he understood one of them to say. "If there had only been the sacrifice according to the ritual, the whole affair would have been complete."

Hefty should have taken warning. The residents of this city lived in a watertight world of their own. They weren't used to foreigners. They had no official greeter to extend the glad hand to wandering men or wingmen who drifted into their midst. Instead, it was their policy to seize strangers (as one Dick Bracket could have testified).

Hefty and Gooyay walked freely through the street for a record hour and a half before some citizenry reported them.

The guards flew upon them like demons. Hefty was flabbergasted at this uncivil reception. He couldn't understand why he should be roughly seized and searched, or why they feared that he might climb a tower or throw explosives against the wall.

"I just happened to drop in," he said weakly. "I didn't mean any harm."

They looked at him sourly. Their suspicions turned upon Gooyay. Spies? What was this, the forecast of a winged invasion? Or was this youthful wingman only the guide for the other foreigner?

"I told you so," one of the onlookers said, reviving the earlier rumor that a foreigner had been hiding in their midst. "He's the one we looked for before the celebration. He's that same trouble maker who blasted our wall."

Hefty swung a free fist. The fellow who had spoken out of turn dodged the blow and one of the guards caught it on the jaw. Hefty's hidden punch had floored more than one man twice his size. It floored the guard. The bystanders backed away and held their silence.

But Hefty was soon brought under control, his two hands bound. All he could do was talk. He might have fared better if they had sealed his lips.

"You weren't looking for me, brothers. I've never seen this place before. It's all a mistake. I don't belong here. I want to get back to the rest of my party with this young whippersnapper."

"The rest of your party? Back *where*?"

"Back there in the—huh? Who wants to know?"

The guards glanced toward the open entrance of one of their mines. So those subterranean channels made contact with the outer world! And there was a band of people back there somewhere. . . .

AS THE guards dragged Hefty and Gooyay toward the nearest elevator tower, a small crowd fell in, eyes and ears, questions and taunts. Hefty had never been in a jam like this before. He couldn't keep from shouting back at his hecklers.

"Darn it, I never came here to make trouble. You've got to believe me. I'm a friend of *Stupe Smith*. You didn't rope *him* and drag him up before a judge when he came, *did you*?"

"When *who* came?"

"Stupe, Stupe Smith. He wrote me from here. He said . . ."

Hefty swallowed his words. He had said far more than he had intended. He looked around helplessly. The little winged boy was grinning at him as if to say, "We're having a wonderful adventure, aren't we?"

The two prisoners were tossed into a cell in one of the towers where they could look across the web of high footbridges that led to a central balcony. The city was so far below that it made Hefty dizzy to look down. But Gooyay, accustomed to flying, felt entirely at home at this altitude. His sharp eyes watched the comings and goings of the uniformed guards and workmen with the greatest of interest.

What fascinated Hefty most was the throne, a few steps above the balcony, where a very old man could be seen talking with six starchily dressed committeemen.

"What an ancient relic," Hefty thought.

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"That must be the old gray-beard that Stupe mentioned in his letter."

After many hours of waiting, Hefty was surprised to see several other prisoners being escorted to nearby cells. The whole earth party that he had left back in the tunnels had been ferreted out—Gypsy Brown, the three Stevens girls, Jake Fiddle, Dr. Jabetta, and Frenchy.

"We're all in the same doghouse," said Hefty gloomily. "The judge will probably find us all guilty and condemn us to death—or maybe make us work in the mines."

His little companion suggested that the wingmen might come and rescue them.

"My parents will want to find me. They will try to follow us."

"Don't worry, son. "Nobody's going to follow that awful trail we took, unless it's by accident."

They could now hear echoes of Gypsy Brown's funny pleadings, which the guards evidently couldn't understand. The Stevens girls were too weary to talk. Dr. Jabetta tried to argue his way out of this gross mistreatment, but his efforts were futile.

"Save your arguments," one of the guards said. "Maybe the Old Man will listen to you when you are brought to trial. But I warn you, he is a stern judge."

"What's more," another guard added, "he is pretty busy just now, honeymooning. I don't think he's in the mood to listen to your troubles."

CHAPTER XLVIII

HEFTY slept like a dead man and did not awaken until someone rattled the iron bars of his tower cell. He opened his eyes. The disturbance was being caused by the little winged boy.

"Gooyay! What's all the noise about?"

"I want to get back in."

Hefty's jaw sagged and he blinked his sleepy eyes. "Huh? You *were* in. How in sam-hill did you get out?"

"Right there." Gooyay pointed to the space between two bars. "I was hungry."

"Well, I reckon you can squeeze back in."

"No. I ate too much dinner."

Hefty looked his companion over from head to foot. It was an unusual situation, one of two prisoners on the outside trying to get back in. Hefty wasn't too sleepy to see some possible advantages to this arrangement.

"Take it easy, Gooyay. You're more useful where you are. Tell me—" Hefty looked about to make sure no guards were within hearing—"Where did you get the square meal?"

Gooyay pointed to the balcony. The throne where the Old Man had sat was empty. A dinner had been brought to him on a tray, but he had evidently failed to come for it.

"It was a good dinner," said Gooyay, rubbing his fat little stomach.

"It's a wonder they didn't catch you and clip your wings, you little daredevil. Stay right where you are. I want you to run some errands for me. How long would it take you to retrace your steps through that long tunnel if I got a flashlight for you?"

Gooyay looked to the throne again, and his eyes roved upward to the tower that rose through the dome-like ceiling.

"There is a shorter way," he said, smiling wisely, and his wings gave a proud little twitch.

Hefty stroked his chin thoughtfully. "A way *out?*"

"To the sky," said Gooyay, "and to the sea . . . and back to the land."

"Eureka, little pal!"

"What does that mean?"

"It means I'd pin a medal to your chest if I had a medal and you had anything besides bare skin to pin it to. Now listen to me closely."

"I'm listening."

"Your parents are on the land looking for you."

"Of course. And all my Uncles and Cousins. You were afraid of them. That is why you took me down in the cave."

THE little dickens was wise, all right, Hefty thought. "It was a case of bad judgment, pal. We should have tried to

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make friends."

"But Gunawoo does not make friends with you wingless people."

"That's the point. Gunawoo was a tough hunk of feathers. Well, Gunawoo is dead now."

The lad already knew this, too. He hadn't missed much of the earth party's guarded conversation. "He died when he shook hands with the doctor. Now that he is dead, you can be friends easier."

"You're on the beam, Gooyay. You should have two medals. Here's your first errand. Get out of this undersea booby trap and fly back to the land. Find your parents. Tell them you're alive. Tell them you haven't been harmed."

"I will tell them everyone has been good to me. I have had fun."

"Lad, I could hug you if I wasn't afraid of crushing your wings."

"I will tell them that Aunt Gypsy feeds me chocolate pies."

"Yes!"

"But I will not say that I stole some."

Hefty chuckled. "I'll trust your good judgment on those delicate matters. Now, the second errand. *If* your parents aren't too angry, ask them if you can come back."

"I'll run away."

"No, don't do that. That's what caused all the trouble in the first place. Ask permission. Tell them you have some unfinished business out here in the sea—"

"The guards are coming." Gooyay interrupted. "Shall I go?"

His orange wings showed bright under the intense glow of the concentric lights overhead. But his instinct told him how to make the most of shadows and protective coloration. He skipped quietly along a path of orange light and took to his wings almost silently. Hefty saw him circle to the balcony, bound up the spiral stairs, and disappear.

The four guards trudged past the other tower cells with speculative glances at the inmates.

"Here are the two we captured first," Hefty heard one of them say as they approached his cell.

"Two?" said another. "I see only one."

The four guards paused before Hefty's bar, staring at the floor, the ceiling, and all the corners of the well built cage. Most of all, they stared at Hefty.

"Where is he?" they said.

"Who?" said Hefty innocently.

"You know who. There were two of you. What went with number two?"

"I've been asleep," said Hefty. He yawned and patted his stomach. "Funny thing. I dreamed I ate a little winged boy. And to tell the truth I feel awful full."

THE guards may have lacked a sense of humor, Hefty thought; or they may have considered cannibalism a definite possibility among the various denizens of Venus. Their deadpan expressions told him nothing. Their one purpose now was to take him before the authorities to give an account of himself.

A quick walk along the elevated passages high above the city brought Hefty to the throne, six steps above the central balcony.

The Old Man shuffled uncomfortably, Hefty thought, and appeared to be more ill at ease than the six stern-faced committeemen.

"Sit down," the Old Man said in a cracked voice. "We have several questions for you. First, why did you come here?"

Hefty tried to turn away from those searching eyes. He caught a glimpse of the other towers and knew that the other members of his party, imprisoned there, were depending upon him to lie his way out of this jam. Very well, he would lie magnificently.

"We were searching for a friend," said Hefty slowly. His furtive glance passed along the row of faces. The committeemen drilled him with accusing eyes. One of them said, "Go on, tell us your story."

"We were looking for a friend named Stupe Smith—"

"Where? Down in our mines?" the Old Man said, gruffly interrupting. "All right, go on. What was he doing in our mines? Spying on us?"

"He wouldn't do *that*," said Hefty, oiling his voice with innocence. "He is an

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explorer and a right guy. He just got off the trail."

"How? Why?"

"Well, something bumped him on the head. One of those five-ton snails pushed a couple-ton rock off a cliff accidentally, and it hit this guy Stupe—"

"How do you know the snail did it accidentally?" the Old Man asked.

"Because this guy Stupe is such a square guy that not even a snail would do him a dirty trick."

"All right. The two-ton rock fell and killed your friend. Then what?"

"It didn't exactly kill him," said Hefty, mopping the perspiration from his forehead. "It just knocked him cuckoo. So he started running around like a bumblebee in a hail storm and he ran into that cave."

"Why?"

"Because he was crazy. He didn't know where he was going."

"He should be killed on sight," said the Old Man. "Tell us what he looks like."

"Well, he's about as tall as you, and his eyes are about the color of yours, and his nose—"

"Never mind the details," said the Old Man. "If he's down in our mines we'll find him. The committeemen will no doubt dispatch a party at once . . . What do you say, gentlemen?"

The committeemen nodded and echoed, "At once." The Old Man dismissed them.

Hefty gave a relieved sigh and turned to go, but the Old Man barked at the guards.

"Keep him here until I question him further."

Hefty gulped. The blood rushed through his brain. It was going to take a bigger and better lie, he decided, for the Old Man's fingers were twitching and that might be a sign of anger.

When he, the four guards and the Old Man were alone, the investigation started all over again.

"I can always tell when men are lying to me," the aged voice resumed. "You see, I have the gift of reading minds. Your name—your name is Hefty Winkle. . . ."

Hefty's blood froze. He sank deeper into the chair as the Old Man, unquestionably a wizard, unfolded many facts before him. He told Hefty his age, his birthplace, his occupation and the number of prize fights he had lost and won.

"I can also name the members of your party."

This was too much for Hefty. He noticed that the guards, too, were standing in awe of the Old Man's every word. Then Hefty saw something that eased his tense muscles just a trifle. It was such an infinitesimal detail that he couldn't be sure, but it seemed to him that the face hidden within the flowing white locks and the bushy white beard was *smiling*.

Yes, there was a barely perceptible Santa Claus twinkle at the corners of the Old Man's eyes.

"So you were looking for your friend Stupe," the Old Man went on, "and you don't know where he is?"

Hefty raised an eyebrow. "Confidentially, I think I do. But I won't tell."

CHAPTER XLIX

THE undersea courtroom scene became more complicated later in the day when the rest of the earth party were ushered in for questioning.

"Vot effer you're accusing me uff, I didn't do it," Gypsy Brown asserted, her earrings clinking as she shook her head with innocence.

"They can't pin anything on us," said Thelma Stevens. She whispered to Frenchy, "What did you do with your knife?"

Frenchy shrugged and wobbled his eyes as if to avoid any mention of the matter. Hefty, looking him over, decided that the guards had probably taken it. Frenchy and Jake Fiddle were unshaved, and Hefty knew that their pirate-like appearance would go against the whole party in a trial like this.

The Old Man's questioning was resumed as soon as the six committeemen reentered and seated themselves. Earlier the committee had recessed to start a search for the Mystical Stupe Smith, rumored to be somewhere in the mine tunnels. A happy

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inspiration had come to their rescue, however. The flow of water seeping through the patch and sliding down to the city streets was diverted to the mine shafts. Until a new patch could be prepared, the mines would serve as a flood-control measure. Anyone hiding within those myriad shafts had better come out or be drowned out.

"It's a wonder the Old Man didn't think of that idea himself," one of the committee men had commented. "By the way, do you notice how he has changed? He has only been married to the goddess a few hours and already he seems younger. Her gift of Youth Eternal is extending to him also."

Other members of the committee agreed. They noted that he spoke a little less slowly.

"His voice is stronger," one said.

"His decisions, too."

"But he is worried about the leaking wall. Watch his eyes."

"That is why our people need *not* worry. Our gods do our worrying for us."

"Are we sure he *is* a god?" one skeptic asked. "To me, he is a god only as long as the wall holds the sea out. For several days the wall patch has been leaking. I am uncertain . . ."

There was similar confusion throughout the undersea city. Everyone had heard the mysterious words of the Spirit, during the wedding. Puzzling words, indeed—words which seemed to warn the city against bearing the weight of too many gods.

THE Old Man rapped for attention, and the six native dignitaries ceased their whispering. The Old Man spoke, directing his words toward the eight members of the earth party.

"It is unnecessary for me to ask you more questions," he said slowly. "I can read your minds and your motives. I *know* what it is that you want most of all."

He paused. One of the committeemen, feeling that the committee was being left out in the cold, asked, "What *is* it that they want most of all?"

"They want to find their friend, Stupe Smith," the Old Man said. "They came to Venus to help him look for our own goddess, Zaleena-Zaleese, who rides the white stallion under the sea."

Gypsy Brown's eyebrows jumped. "How did you know dot?"

"I know your minds and your motives," the Old Man repeated. "But I am afraid you will be disappointed. I am afraid that Stupe Smith has betrayed you."

Hefty felt his nerves tying into knots. *Was this Old Man actually Stupe Smith, in disguise?* A few minutes earlier Hefty would have sworn that he was. But these words made him doubt it.

"I am afraid you have placed your faith in the wrong leader," the Old Man continued.

"Is he alive or dead?" Dr. Jabetta asked.

"He is alive," said the Old Man, "but he does not intend to go through with his original plan."

"I don't believe it." Hefty came to his feet, shaking his fists. "Stupe Smith wouldn't let us down. We've been loyal to him—"

"Silence!" The Old Man warned in a quavering voice. "He has *changed.* He has dropped old loyalties for new ones."

"Vot kind of dope did you gif him?" Gypsy asked.

"He has seen the goddess Zaleena-Zaleese."

"Don't tell us he falls vor a woman so easy," Gypsy retorted. "Besides, they say *she iss married to you!"*

The Old Man's stony face gave no flicker of response. "I can only tell you that Stupe Smith, having seen the goddess, believes that she belongs here with her people. He would never be a party to her kidnapping."

There were sullen mutterings among the eight earth folks. The six committeemen looked on with puzzled expressions. This was too much for them. A kidnapping plot against their goddess? Unthinkable! Absurd!

SLOWLY the hard meaning of the Old Man's words penetrated. "We've been

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made fools of," one of the Stevens girls mumbled. "Stupe has betrayed us."

Dr. Jabetta spoke up. "All right, you whiskered wizard, you seem to know all the answers. I suppose you know what I'm thinking right now."

"You are thinking," said the Old Man, "that you will take over Stupe's purpose yourself, that you will kidnap the girl and claim the prize yourself . . . Am I right?"

The doctor glared, red-faced. "All right, what if I do?"

"You wouldn't!" Hefty leaped to his feet again.

"Why not? If Stupe has walked out on the job—"

"*If* he has, there must be a good reason!" Little Hefty Winkle smacked his fists together, just daring anyone in the crowd to disagree with him. Two guards forced him to sit down.

From her wallside palace the goddess herself now appeared, riding across the elevated passageway to the central balcony. Hefty was fascinated as the bright glow of lights flooded down over the stallion's gleaming white mane. Sparkles of colored light flashed from the jeweled harpoon the girl held carelessly over her pink shoulder. She tossed her head, and smiled as if to convey her blithe unconcern for all of this serious business. But Hefty sensed that she knew what was happening and had deemed it high time for her to get into the game and to play her own hand.

"How earnest you earth people do talk," she said, pausing in front of the group. "Marble Boy and I can answer for ourselves." She ran her fingers over the proudly curved neck of her mount. *"We wish to leave this undersea kingdom. Which of you can lead us to a ship that will take us into the sky? Marble Boy and I wish to go to your earth at once."*

Her words struck like a bolt of lightning. The committeemen sat open-mouthed, gasping for words.

Gypsy Brown blurted. "Vell, say something, somebody. Ven do ve start? Does your Old Man go mit?"

"That," said the goddess, "is entirely up to him."

CHAPTER L

THE continents of Venus, as viewed from the air by the second Wellington expedition, were bright and tempting. Vast untilled acres of level land awaited the pioneer farmers who would soon come to this planet. Mountain ranges lifted their rocky peaks to the passing summer clouds. Their sides were bluish-green in the late afternoon sunshine, their shadowed valleys a brilliant purple. Silver streams threaded the colorful landscape. It was an enchanting picture, one which, to the eyes of any earth visitor, gave promise of a prosperous and peaceful nation in the future.

Peace was hardly the word for the present state of human relationships in this broad land, however. The second expedition had come prepared to accomplish Wellington's purpose, the swiftest way, let the chips fly where they may.

By this afternoon they had already run rough shod over two barriers. They had by-passed the American ambassador's official inspection. They had retorted with sarcasm to radio messages from Captain Meetz.

Mae Krueger, the pretty, red-haired wife of the second expedition's captain, was not pleased by this second rash action.

"We better make our peace with Captain Meetz, Sam," she advised. "He's already on the grounds. What he has learned might be valuable."

During the past hour she had observed several flocks of wingmen and had had her first sight of the red-and-white monster snails moving along a valley where the rains had recently fallen.

"We'll start right with Meetz," said her husband, his jaws snapping. "We'll give no orders and take no orders."

They expected to find the captain of the first expedition in a well established camp on the beach somewhere above the Thirteenth Finger. The radio messages had advised them of the location and assured them that the terrain was suitable for a landing of their ship. Sam Krueger assumed that all fourteen of the original party would be grouped around waiting to receive them.

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"I don't care to have my plans laid out for me like so many pills to be swallowed."

"Are we to land or not?" the navigator asked.

"Fly over, keep your elevation, and we'll look the situation over."

They cruised above the Thirteenth Finger and looked down on the yellow beach. One plane stood there unconcealed. Not far from it a line of tiny figures could be seen in semicircular formation around a patch of mountain side.

"There's your party," said Mae Krueger. "Not fourteen but a hundred and forty."

Her husband handed her the binoculars. "Take a look."

SHE gazed and drew a surprised breath. "Wingmen . . . What does that mean? Isn't this where they told us to land?"

"It is," said Sam, "but we're not taking orders."

They cruised over. The radio failed to pick up any more messages. This was disturbing, and Mae began to fear that some trouble had overtaken the original party.

"We'd better go back, Sam."

At sunset, after the quick survey of the "shoulder" and "face" which the continent outlined against the blue of the Southeast, Sam Krueger decided there was no better landing spot than the designated beach. The ship glided down slowly, silently.

"They see us," Mae exclaimed. "They're turning to watch us ride in."

The ship came to a stop within a few yards of the apparently deserted plane. To the west, in the shadow of the mountain, the semicircle of more than a hundred wingmen stood their ground. They appeared to be guarding the entrances of a few scattered caves in the mountainslope, though they had now turned to watch the landing of the new ship.

Krueger ordered everyone to remain on the ship until some further communication could be established. From all indications the radio of Captain Meetz was no longer functioning.

"What do you think happened, Sam?" Mae asked. "Where do you think they were radioing from in the first place?"

Sam Krueger shook his head. "Keep your eye on those winged fellows. Let me know if you see any signs of weapons."

Mae strained her eyes to catch every detail of the surrounding landscape. She believed that the wingmen must have come up unexpectedly and that the whole Meetz party had hidden for safety.

"They're either in their plane or in one of those caves," she said.

"If they were in the plane they would show their faces at the windows. If they were in the caves—well, they *might* be in the caves," Sam conceded. "We'll taxi over and see."

They rolled the ship a few yards westward, moving carefully through the line of winged humans. This caused a flurry of wings and a lot of exciting squawking. The wingmen, tall, bronzed, fierce-looking, with hair and eyebrows of coarse black string-like hair, were angry and half terrorized over this latest intrusion upon their affairs. Neither Mae nor Sam guessed the seriousness of this seemingly harmless drive into their ranks. Mae would never have believed that a tribal religion had sanctioned their vigil. Tribal gods would be angered.

THE wingmen, their prides injured deeply, were realizing as never before the peril of earth man's encroachments. Little by little their vast free lands were being invaded. Though such winged people as Panno and his wife Latee might try to minimize the cruel intent of the *unwinged,* nevertheless here was another event that would refresh the memories of their tragedies . . . Once a wingman had been shot on the street in the Venusian capital, and later his skeleton had been given to the ambassador as a memento of their bitterness. . . . Within recent days the strange murder of Gunawoo had occurred before their very eyes. Could these cruelties ever be explained or justified?

The clusters of winged men who fled the cave entrances and gathered along the crest of the mountain had begun to see themselves as creatures doomed.

"That ship of the sky," one of them said, "could spit fire at us and kill us all.

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We are staring at a man-made monster which may bring an end to our days."

"We are more numerous than they." Panno, the father of the lost boy, had learned patience. He did his best to snatch at a few straws of optimism.

"They are powerful because of their weapons."

"We are more powerful because we have wings."

"They have no wings, but they have machines that can outfly us. Unless we have weapons, they can search out our hiding places and rain death upon us."

"Peace!" Panno shouted. "We have no reason to be so frightened. Look, they have seen us but they are *not* shooting at us. They are walking slowly toward the caves—"

"With weapons ready."

"But *not for us*. Only for unseen dangers that may lurk within the caves."

Panno's voice was strained, but he had succeeded in making his point. The conflict was not one of earth men against wingmen at this hour. It was one of earth men against their own fears. This was something worth knowing—that earth men should fear the unknown. Perhaps it meant that they were not so different from wingmen, after all.

Panno had scored a moral victory with his tribe by his argument against fear and panic.

As good fortune would have it, the gain was clinched for him within a few minutes.

A little winged boy flew in from over the waves and as he approached, Latee gave a glad cry.

"Gooyay! My little lost Gooyay! He is coming back to us!"

Five minutes later the errant lad, his tired face bright with smiles, was telling his rapt audience all about the friendliness of Aunt Gypsy Brown and her earth companions.

CHAPTER LI

OF THE several earth men who were pursuing their destinies in or around the Southeast Ocean of Venus, none was more ambitious than the hot-headed young gunman, Dick Bracket.

This land of wide open spaces might, in the future, become the home of many an outlaw before civilization should take root. In his recent hours of dare-devil glory it occurred to Dick that *he* might set the pace for a coming era of gunmen.

Several times in recent days he had added notches to his gun, figuratively speaking. With each escapade he had grown bolder. Now a daring scheme burned in his mind.

"Captain Meetz is afraid of me," he said to himself over and over. He had been saying it ever since that day in the hospital when he had talked to the sick captain.

That incident had resulted in the captain's leaving his sick bed too soon, coming out to the open lands to try to recover command of his scattered expedition.

After flying southeast across the continent, with Bull Fiddle at the controls, the three of them had hidden themselves and their plane in a hillside camp a safe distance from the beach. Through field glasses they had watched the strange activities of the flocks of wingmen.

They had not yet solved the mystery of that curious assemblage when the first radio messages of the second Wellington expedition began to come through.

"Now what are we up against?" Bull Fiddle had grumbled.

"Competition," said Dick Bracket.

Captain Meetz had smiled confidently. "Don't worry, boys. This is according to plan. Wellington arranged for a second party. I'll have command."

Dick had nodded without commenting.

Together they had gone to work at the radio. There was only one logical place along this coast for a large space ship to land.

At first the captain was reluctant to send the new party into a hotbed of winged trouble.

"Let *them* worry about that," Dick had said. "What we want to know is, will their captain take orders?"

The captain had agreed, partly because he didn't care to start a quarrel with Dick. He radioed instructions. Krueger came back at him with replies that were evasive

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and sometimes sarcastic. Captain Meetz lost his patience.

"We'll have to tame those boys before we can do business together for Wellington."

HE AND Dick watched the ship cruise over and float away into the eastern sky. The captain muttered profanities. Bull Fiddle looked on uncomfortably. Dick was strangely silent.

At sunset they saw the ship return for a landing.

"There's going to be some shooting," said Captain Meetz. "They'll start wrong. Watch, now."

"Why don't we radio to them and tell them it's a crime to attack wingmen," Bull Fiddle asked.

"Let them make their own mistakes," said the captain, gazing through his field glasses.

A little later he said, "Where did Dick go?"

"I dunno," said Bull Fiddle. "Up on the hill for a better view, I reckon."

The sun was sinking, and the animated wings along the crest of the mountain were darkening into silhouettes in the twilight.

"Where'd Dick go?" the captain asked again.

But Bull Fiddle, absorbed in the scene before him, didn't answer. It was an interesting drama down there on the beach. The newcomers, emerging from their ships, had evidently bluffed the wingmen out. There hadn't been any shooting after all—just an easy retreat on the part of the wings. The new party were apparently enjoying the thrills of exploring a new land. They had seen the wingmen, they had discovered the mountainside caves, they were now turning their attention to ten or twelve giant snails that were moving slowly along the beach.

"We should go over and watch the show," said Bull Fiddle.

"I'll go," said Captain Meetz. "You stay here and guard the camp."

"Can't I come along? Dick'll be coming back."

"I don't know," said the captain in a low voice. "He's had something on his mind the last hour or so. We'll do well to keep an eye on him—if he comes back."

. . . .

Dick was at that moment riding on the back of one of the giant snails.

"This way," he said half aloud, giving the snail a light jab to encourage it in the right course. He had ridden a snail once before under less comfortable conditions. Whatever that earlier ride may have cost him in hurt pride or actual physical suffering, he had learned something about snail management.

This ride was both more comfortable and less conspicuous. A chance observer wouldn't have known that the apparently undirected mass of red protoplasm was weighed down by anything other than its own shell.

But Dick Bracket had found, earlier, an old empty shell of a larger snail, dried and bleached under the sun; and he had set it aside for emergency purposes.

Now the false shell rested above the real one, and Dick, lying between the two, rode in comparative comfort. He drilled a hole through the outer one for vision. He thus was able to guide his slow-paced taxi toward the newly arrived ship.

A light dash of rain a few hours earlier had caused several snails to move along this path beside the sea. Dick watched as the foremost snail attracted the attention of the new party.

"What *is* it?" a red-haired girl cried, watching nervously as the creature lumbered past at a safe distance. She called to her husband, who in turn called to someone else to watch out for her; he was busy at one of the caves, trying to read the clues left by recent visitors.

DICK BRACKET was playing in luck. The newcomers were properly curious about the snails, as well as the wingmen, but, finding them harmless, showed no inclination to open fire on them.

Dick was passing the space ship now. The entrance to the air locks was only twenty feet away.

"Would you look at that?" he heard someone say. The two men who had stayed to guard the ship were referring to

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his crustacean taxi. "Let's see what goes on here."

They came out toward him cautiously, like a pair of boys examining a live rattlesnake. They saw, however, that the others of the party had found the passing snails harmless enough, so they grew bolder. They came close enough to tap the shell that Dick was hiding under.

For an instant he hesitated. What had they tapped him with? A gun, perhaps?

"We ought to cut a chip out of that shell for a souvenir," one of the guards said. "Here, lend me your pocketknife and I'll—"

Dick leaped up, and the false shell toppled over backward. His pistol was ready. He caught a glimpse of two surprised faces; a knife dropped, two pairs of hands went up.

"Don't squawk or I'll blow your heart out," Dick snapped.

He might have saved his words. The two men were speechless. They must have had visions of the whole flock of snails being inhabited by invading gunmen.

"Into the ship! Quick!" he commanded. "Never mind the others. We'll pick them up later."

The guards scarcely flicked their eyes toward the rest of the party. They turned obediently and rushed into the entrance, with Dick on their heels.

"Which one of you runs this boat? Get on the controls, one of you."

"The pilot's in there," one of them managed to say.

Dick found himself in command of four willing slaves, a moment later—the two guards, the pilot and the man at the radio.

His action had not been smooth enough to escape the attention of the rest of the party. Near the caves, Captain Krueger, having seen this unaccountable development, had called his party into a huddle. They expended several pistol shots on the passing snails, thinking that other shells might flop off to reveal concealed passengers. Dick saw, then, that Krueger was hurrying over to the ship shouting and gesticulating, expecting to force a personal show-down with someone he had never been introduced to.

"Move out!" Dick ordered the ship's pilot. "One false move and I'll toss your corpse to one side. . . . That's right, straight ahead. . . . Now, circle to the right. We'll land in the little valley to the north. There's a couple more passengers to pick up."

The ship skimmed over the Thirteenth Finger, and a flock of wingmen scattered. Inside the ship one of the alert guards made an unwise pass with his right hand. He came up with a pistol, but not fast enough. Dick shot him twice, and he fell forward with both hands over his heart.

The three remaining men were silently obedient.

"Here's the place. Bring her down easy. . . . All right, open the doors and wait."

CAPTAIN MEETZ and Bull Fiddle had started back to camp as soon as they had seen the ship glide into the air. Now they edged cautiously through the twilight, for the space monster was coming toward them. They gained camp, however, and began radioing messages to the ship, even though it was coming to rest only a few yards away.

"Dick must have sent them this way," Meetz reasoned, "or they wouldn't have known anyone was here."

Within a few minutes Dick's relayed messages convinced Meetz.

"So they're telling me to come aboard," said the captain, red with anger. This was a crude way to establish working relations with the incoming party.

"Shall we go?" asked Bull dubiously.

"I'd just as well set the new captain straight now as later."

They entered the airlocks. They heard Dick's rasping voice.

"Right in here, Meetz. I've just explained to these three men who's boss. The dead one wasn't in a mood to listen."

Captain Meetz felt weak. He had overexerted during the past hour; he was not yet a well man.

"Dick! You've jumped the gun again. There was no need to hurry. I've told you before—"

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"Save your breath, Meetz," said Dick.

Captain Meetz noticed that he was no longer being addressed as captain. Dick's surly tone sounded dangerous. "I've told you before, Dick, that Wellington fixed this set-up. The new captain knows that *I'm* in charge."

"That who's in charge?" Dick's eyes blazed. "You've just been promoted to the kindergarten, pal. If you want to string along with me, okay. If you don't, now's the time to say so."

Captain Meetz looked from the startled face of big Bull Fiddle to the dead form on the floor and back to the maniacal glare of Dick Bracket. The pilot, the radio operator and the remaining guard might have been statues oblivious to the drama going on around them.

"All right, *Captain* Bracket," said Meetz slowly. "Where do we go from here?"

CHAPTER LII

IT WAS pitch-dark over most of the Southeast Ocean, but one particular spot not far from the Tenth Finger was aglow, as usual, with concentric circles of red, orange, and yellow light.

The small platform appeared like a bright slab of silver a few feet above the black water. The huge ship, with counter motors humming quietly, settled down beside it as lightly as a balloon.

"Throw a bridge out to the platform," Dick said to the guard. "Now, listen, the rest of you. We're fixing to take a little surprise back to J. J. Wellington. In a few minutes we'll be on our way back to the earth. We're stopping here just long enough to pick up a couple of passengers—a gal and her horse."

Somewhere in New York J. J. Wellington glowered over his drink, rereading the newspaper account of one mysterious little Mr. Vest.

"The London Society of Scientists has adopted a resolution," the account read, "to expend a few thousand dollars to investigate the Venusian phenomena which Mr. Vest, the interplanetary traveler, described in his recent lecture. . . ."

Wellington tossed the paper aside, grumbling to himself.

"Damn Vest anyhow! . . . His imagination. . . . Even the scientists are going for it. . . . Damn it all, if there *is* anything to it, why didn't Vest convince *me?*"

On his way back to his study he pondered his next communication to Ambassador Jewell on Venus. The ambassador was near the end of his patience, evidently. The original motive for the Wellington expeditions had worn thin. Had the second party been able to reinforce the hoax, by this time? Or had Krueger, with his dynamic and impetuous ways, ridden roughshod over the authorities?

"No further communication from Venus, sir, I'm sorry," his secretary said the moment he entered his study.

"Clip that story on Mr. Vest from the daily paper and send it to Ambassador Jewell," said Wellington. "We'll show that numbskull!"

"I hope you're not going to get into trouble on this deal, Mr. Wellington."

"How can I? I heard a story and I acted on it. The London scientists heard the same story and they're acting on it. Where's the trouble?"

"Some government investigators have been here asking questions, sir. I think they'll come back tomorrow to see you."

BENEATH the massive rings of light in the Southeast Ocean the Inspector made his hurried round of the six-pointed city.

"You are not as fat as you used to be," one of the citizens taunted. "Are you working overtime or worrying too much?"

"Both," said the Inspector, and hurried on.

Some of the eggs he would find to be occupied. Scared families who had lost their faith in the power of the Old Man to patch the wall were gathering together a few days' supply of food and moving into their spherical lifeboats to be ready. The flood was inevitable, they believed.

"No faith," the Inspector would mutter. But he was not immune to their fears. Each time he passed his own house he would walk into the egg and out again to make sure that he wasn't too fat to enter.

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Clouds of steam filled the upper levels of air above the city. The workmen were busy reconstructing the patch on the vast stone glass wall. The patch, no longer transparent like most of the wall, had become an opaque grayish-brown blotch. Fifteen ribbons of water slid through it and glided silently to the wide pool that was accumulating over the city's floor. One of the six points of the plaza was obscured by a foot of water. The Inspector would slosh along through it in his bare feet.

Stupe Smith sat facing the six committeemen. He knew that his time was short. Things were closing in on him. His relationship with this undersea world was like a cyclone full of question marks. The committeemen were shooting questions at him thick and fast. *Did they still believe that he was the Old Man, or had they seen through his hoax?*

"Do you remember how long it took your grandfather to build this structure?" one of them asked sharply. "How old were you at the time? Well, why don't you answer? Has your memory gone dim? I thought your marriage to Zaleena would restore your youth. You seem to have forgotten everything."

"Leave him alone," Zaleena said. "Stop persecuting him. Can't you see he is weary? He needs rest. He has had no rest since the Spirit spoke to us in the ceremony. He has been holding court continuously."

The committeemen were talking uneasily among themselves. They had not been satisfied with the court and Stupe knew it. Not a single charge had he held out against Hefty and the rest of the party. The investigation had turned into a sort of mind-reading exercise, and while this demonstration had greatly impressed Gypsy Brown and some of the others, it had now begun to boomerang from the hardboiled committeemen. How, they had asked each other, did the Old Man know so much about these foreigners? "The Old Man is behaving strangely," one of them said aloud. "He has accomplished nothing."

This, Stupe conceded, was true. He had only ordered Hefty and the others back to their cells to await his further consideration.

THE inquisition was growing hot around Stupe now. Somehow he expected one of the committeemen to jump up and yank off his false whiskers at any moment.

Poor Zaleena! *She* was doing her best to divert them.

"Please go back to your homes. It is almost morning. After the Old Man and I have had our wedding breakfast together we will call for you. Then if you are not pleased with our decisions, let us read more from the ancient book. We may even call our Spirit to come back and speak to us."

The committeemen rose at her command and started to file out of the throne room. But at that moment a flutter and flurry from the spiral stairs attracted them. They stopped and turned.

It was little Gooyay! He was half flying, half bounding down the steps.

"Gooyay!" The cry came from Gypsy Brown, watching from her cell across the balcony.

The winged urchin must have been flying for all he was worth. His face was flushed, his hair wind-blown.

The child was shouting in his high-pitched voice. Stupe knew, before he could catch the words, that it was a cry of alarm.

"They will kill you!"

The six committeemen shrank back into a frightened huddle. From across the way Gypsy and the Stevens sisters, Hefty, and the others were straining at their bars to see what was happening. They had gone back to their cells willingly after the trial because they had felt a strange confidence in the Old Man. But at the sound of an alarm they were terrorized, realizing their helplessness.

"They will kill you!" The fluttering wingboy screamed again, racing toward Stupe.

From across the balcony the engineers at the wall stopped their machines to take in this weird outburst. From the city eight hundred feet below, hundreds of spectators on the streets stared upward into the light.

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It was Stupe, posing as an Old Man, who was most upset by this outburst.

"Who? What?" He almost forgot to use his Old Man's voice.

"They have guns! They are coming!"

Little Gooyay, flapping his wings madly, tried to push the men out of their lethargy. They were too slow about moving and he wanted them out of the way of the spiral path when some enemy descended.

With the best of intentions the little winged fellow grabbed Stupe by the hair and yanked. It was a mistake. The flowing white locks of the "Old Man" slipped off and fell to the steps.

"Old Man!" one of the committeemen taunted, and acting upon impulse he reached out and grabbed the long white beard. It jerked away from Stupe's chin, the snowy wisps scattering.

"You! You fake! You're a foreigner!"

Stupe stood exposed. For one brief instant his practiced mannerisms of old age restrained his muscles. Then he broke out of the role, as suddenly as a dead man jumping out of his coffin. He was Stupe Smith, ready for action, ready with a good pair of youthful fists.

CHAPTER LIII

"FAKE! *Fake!"* The committeemen cried. The six of them started for Stupe in a body, their hands reaching like six pairs of claws.

At the same time Gooyay kept shouting.

"They are coming! Hide or they will kill!"

The goddess Zaleena and her good horse Marble Boy were the heroine and hero of that moment, as far as Stupe was concerned. Hoofs clattered around the throne, the stallion's white head and flowing mane shook with a weird beating motion, faster than the flap of little Gooyay's wings. The committeemen who failed to dodge were struck down. They rolled in a heap.

At the same time bright-colored dust—the luminous "dream dust" that Stupe had encountered many days ago in the finger prints on his map—shook out of the horse's mane like flour from a feather duster. The place was at once in *a luminous fog.*

Stupe could barely see Zaleena reaching her hand out to him. He tried to catch it. She meant for him to mount and ride away with her. He leaped and missed, and fell at the foot of the throne.

As he fell he had a quick vision of death—not his own, but that of Gypsy, the girls, Hefty and the others. If he rode away with Zaleena, what would become of *them?* It was better that he missed. He scrambled to his feet.

"She'll desert her people!"

It was a bitter thought for this wild moment. Footsteps were clattering down the spiral stairs. That would be the men with the guns. Gooyay was right, this foggy brilliance would soon be blazing with gunfire. And at such a time Stupe could think only of his loyalty to his friends in their cells—*and his strange bitterness toward the goddess he had married.*

What had she done to *deserve* to be a goddess? Even now the hoofs were thundering away from the scene of danger. She would ride off into the sea. No one else could ride under the sea, but she would look out for her own life. Yes, and if she got a chance she would flee this very planet! Why? *Why?*

Frantically Stupe was groping through the sparkling fog, unaware that he was jerking nervously at the remains of the Old Man's white beard that stuck to his chin.

Gooyay, continuing his wild alarm, had flown across to Gypsy. Wings! How lucky the little devil was to have wings in time of danger! In Stupe's spinning thoughts the future of this planet would be in the hands of men endowed with wings.

Zing! Zing! Zing! The bullets were spitting from some unseen gun on the spiral stairs.

The command rang out in a familiar voice.

"Lie down on your backs! Down or we'll shoot! Down with your hands in the air!"

Captain Meetz! Stupe gulped. So the captain himself had rallied. Dick must have put the story across with him. They had come on this fateful dawn, to take the undersea city by storm.

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"Shoot a couple," came Dick's low snarl. "That's the quickest way to establish order. I said *shoot*—"

STUPE knew, then, that Captain Meetz was taking orders instead of giving them. The gun blazed a path through the fog, and two of the six committeemen spun in their tracks and toppled against the balcony railing.

The four others were racing around the elevated passageway, stumbling, shouting incoherent curses against the "Old Man." In their terror they might have blamed anyone for this unaccountable attack. To them the wild warning cries of Gooyay and the unmasking of the foreigner, Smith, were all a part of the some incomprehensible pattern.

"Where's the gal on the horse?" Stupe heard Dick's shout as the young murderer charged down the steps.

"Where's the gal? We want the gal!" Dick bent over one of the fallen committeemen and repeated his shrill demand. "We're takin' her back with us, see?"

"You can't kill her!" the dying fellow moaned. "She has a gift that will defy you . . . Eternal youth . . . Eternal—"

Stupe didn't hear the last of the poor fellow's speech, for Dick gave the fallen form a thrust with his foot. The fellow slipped through the rail and fell, his moan fading away like a dying siren . . . Eight hundred feet down.

Stupe didn't know how long he had been using his fists. All he knew was that other men had bounded down the stairs—three earth men that he had never seen before, and that he was battling them, knocking the guns out of their hands, dodging them as they ganged up on him. Twice he retreated all the way around the throne, parrying their blows, knocking them down, watching them leap up again like staggering shadows within a glowing mist.

Zaleena must have ridden past during the thick of the fight. He heard the approach of hoofs, beating like drums. He heard her voice, calling commands to her servants. Then the hoofs were running up the spiral stairs. A cloud of luminous dust thickened the air again.

"Come with us, Smith!" was Zaleena's call. "Leave them and come! If you love me—"

In the pandemonium Zaleena's call was lost.

Stupe had run from the flying fists for a brief moment, trying to hear more of Zaleena's call. His adversaries were left back of the throne, gathering themselves up, catching their breath for a renewed attack. But at that instant a bit of clearing in the fog revealed to Stupe the slightly bent, broad-shouldered figure of Captain Meetz, before him.

"*Meetz!*" Stupe cried. "*You!*. I wouldn't have thought this of you!"

MEETZ gripped his gun. But instead of pointing it at Stupe he leveled it at some target across the elevated passageway.

"It's that damned maniac!" Meetz snarled through his teeth. He was looking at Dick Bracket. "He forced us."

Dick, having pursued the retreating committeemen, was moving toward one of the towers only a few feet from the grayish-brown patched wall. He turned to see the captain's pistol.

"Don't! Don't! It's me!" he cried. The white of terror showed in his eyes like a flash of white fire. His hands flung upward, his fingers outspread.

The captain shot at him three times. The bullets cut past him and buried themselves in the wall patch.

The captain tried to shoot again. His gun went dead. Dick's terrorized face turned into a mask of mockery.

"Yah! You *would* turn on me!"

Dick's teeth showed with a gleam of savage triumph. He had beat death. He would beat it again. Then—

A knife flew through the air. Stupe saw it coming toward Dick. That was Frenchy's concealed weapon. It had come from his cell. Frenchy had waited for his chance to turn the trick. A blade through the heart—

But Dick, unaware of this danger, chanced to move back a step, and the flying death missed him.

"Youth eternal!" Stupe gasped under

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his breath. *Had the ancient volume stated that the gift of the goddess would go to another if she were to leave? Had she gone? Did Dick Bracket now bear a charmed life?*

Without knowing it, Stupe had placed his quivering hand on Captain Meetz's shoulder as the two of them stood watching. The captain broke away from him with a startled cry, pointing.

"Hell! The *wall!*"

The whole wide patch suddenly buldged inward like something elastic. From several hundred feet below, one great scream of terror, the composite of thousands of voices, rang through the vast enclosure that protected the city from the sea.

It was like an exploding mountainside. With one gigantic burst, the patched wall leaped inward, high above the city, and the ocean gushed in.

CHAPTER LIV

"WHERE is Hefty?" Stupe Smith kept asking. He was only half conscious. He knew that he had somehow been lifted out of danger. He had come away while the others had been left in peril, trapped. "Where is Hefty? Where is Gypsy Brown?"

"Please be quiet, Stupe," came that soft, soothing voice. "You must rest."

He was riding. Only the sky was outside his windows. He was riding away from danger, and in his troubled mind the sea was still back there somewhere, flooding in upon the city and upon his friends, trapped.

"Where are we going?" he asked. "Why don't we go back? Why don't we help them?"

He was in a space ship and Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu was comforting him. They were on their way back to the earth. There was the lulling hum of the ship's motors vibrating through his body as if with a healing effect. Bandages weighed upon his left arm and shoulder. The pain was slight. The greater pain was from his burning conscience.

They had fled! Why? Why should a goddess, a smiling goddess with a kindly voice, a lovely, attractive girl with magical laughter—why should such a talented person decide to desert her people in time of danger?

"He is resting now. Please do not talk with him." The voice of Zaleena was quietly persuasive.

"What makes you think you can tell me what not to do?" Another feminine voice . . . much harsher . . . familiar, too. A voice Stupe hadn't heard for a long time. A voice that went with red hair and a half forgotten love affair. Yes, that was Mae Krueger, for now she was saying, "I know how to handle Stupe Smith. My husband sent me along to see to it that he got good care."

"I am giving him good care."

"My husband wants me to look after a certain business deal," Mae Krueger said. "Maybe you didn't know that there's a fortune involved. I've come along to manage it for him."

"And what right have you?" Zaleena asked quietly.

"He's an old friend. I used to be in love with him."

"I *am* in love with him," said Zaleena. "And I am *married* to him. Please leave him to me."

Stupe tried to shake out of his stupor. He didn't like the way Mae Krueger laughed at Zaleena's gentle words. She spoke with an air of superiority. The fortune, she said, was to be given him for delivering a prize. "And you, my dear, *are* the prize."

"I—I am the *what?*"

"You're the prize he's taking back to the earth. You and your horse. He's going to trade you off for a million dollars, sister. Don't look so shocked. That's the way big business operates. What do you think he came to see you for in the first place? To make love to you? Oh, no!"

"But he didn't *want* to take me back," Zaleena protested. "No, not once did he ask. *I* had to take *him* back . . . You cannot tell me he is untrue . . . I would rather believe him than you . . . Please stop talking to me and go away . . ."

Stupe smiled inwardly and sank into a deep, contented sleep.

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CHAPTER LV

HEFTY WINKLE watched the sea rush into the vast enclosure. His hands gripped the bars of his cage so tightly he was like something carved of stone-glass. Then he unfroze his fingers to clamp his palms over his ears against the deafening roar.

"Trapped! . . . Trapped! . . . The whole city full of *fanatics!*"

He hadn't called them that before. But in a crisis one's mind will flare out with a passion to damn the guilty parties. Why had these stubborn people clung to their so-called sacred spot right up to the minute of destruction?

If there was a god that was watching over this submerged city, how could this disaster occur?

"Fanatics . . . . They'll all be lost . . . And *we*—"

But before Hefty could call curses down upon his own earth party for getting themselves into this tangle he caught sight of the winged boy flying around in dizzy spirals.

"Gooyay! Gooyay!"

No use trying to outshout the roar of the inpouring sea. Little Gooyay would follow his own whims in this mad hour. Hefty saw him sweep down to the balcony to seize the knife that Frenchy had thrown. The whole framework of elevated passageways was vibrating so that the knife, which had barely clung to the edge, now toppled and fell toward the city beneath.

Like a flash Gooyay darted down and caught it out of the air. He brought it back to the cage of Gypsy and the Stevens girls. The began battering at the bars of their cage with it, steel against iron. A futile effort. Hefty wondered if they were screaming. He couldn't tell. The maddest of howling came from the angry sea, but occasionally he could hear the wails of people below.

Dick had gone down under the first burst of the wall. Hefty had watched him fall, and had seen his body sheared in two by the massive falling flakes of stoneglass.

Captain Meetz and Stupe Smith had been caught by the outer edges of the first torrent, and Bull Fiddle had rushed down the spiral steps with gun in hand just in time to be knocked off his feet and hurled across the central balcony. His pistol had bounced along the walk and fallen overboard. Bull, however, had scrambled to his feet, his two hundred and forty pounds defying the dashing water. He had caught Stupe and jerked him to his feet, and then gone on after Captain Meetz. But the torrent gushed forth in new fury and took the two men and a section of the platform down with it.

Stupe had staggered on the ragged edge for a split second, and Hefty saw that the muscles of his arm and shoulder had been ripped open. The flying wall had hashed him. He was tottering.

ZALEENA must have ridden in from the *outside!* Hefty couldn't be sure. But now, as he tried to reconstruct the dizzy scenes of a few moments before, that was the only way he could picture it.

She had galloped in on the second crest of the gushing waters, her horse had hurdled the rail and landed a fore-hoof on the elevated walk. She had snatched Stupe by the hand just as he was toppling, fainting, falling. The swift pull from her hand caught him up, and the last Hefty saw of him, he had flopped over the rear of the horse like a dead man, his bloody left arm dangling limply in the air.

A profusion of luminous dust had flown from the stallion's tossing mane. The bright fog boiled like a cloud of microscopic diamonds. Hefty blinked at the sight, and saw and heard the water as it dashed against the sides of that sparkling cloud, *and bounced off!*

Now, as Hefty looked down upon the flooding city, he saw that it was this broiling, steaming cloud, expanded and puffing fiercely, that combatted the torrent of waters. Like a whirlwind of unbreakable metal, it had funneled down to the center of the city to push the waters aside.

"If there was a god watching over this city—"

Hefty's low muttered cynicism broke off abruptly. The waves were being *pushed*

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aside by the stubborn, powerful cloud as it flattened over the wide floor in an immense protective disc. Like liquid in a whirling bucket, the roaring flood spun high against the walls. The people raced to the center of the plaza, great huddles of them, momentarily safe in the center of the vast whirlpool. There must have been a god watching over this city . . .

But the waters were still pouring in, and they were rising against the walls, higher and higher. They roared and shrieked with strange thunder as they carried the patches of wall debris. "Eggs" were spinning around, more slowly than the stones with rough edges; some were occupied, for their doors were sealed closed, others were drinking in water noisily. They had been built for this hour of crisis and they were proving their worth. Even when they struck some of the six towers in their rounds, they danced off unharmed.

Higher and higher . . . The water was rising, and the eight members of the earth party were trapped. They had been forgotten by the goddess of this realm, Hefty thought, as he shook the bars. She had ridden away. And Stupe, who never would have deserted, have been carried away.

"He was carried away by her," Hefty said to himself, and the double meaning of his words revealed the thought he had tried to deny.

CHAPTER LVI

J. J. WELLINGTON was perspiring and his lawyers were looking worried. The federal investigators had cut short his ocean cruise to come aboard and question him. Their accusations were too hot for comfort.

"Speak up, Mr. Wellington. Did you have to send a whole arsenal along with your two expeditions?"

"It's a dangerous country," Wellington retorted. "The ambassador will back me up on that."

Ambassador Jewell made no response. He had already spoken his piece. He had come all the way back from Venus to start this fire under Wellington. Here on the deck of Wellington's ocean-going yacht the story was being pieced together.

"I have already described the work of my scouts in their midget planes," Jewell said, when Wellington tried to twist the earlier testimony to his own advantage. "They found that your second expedition did all it could toward establishing military outposts at strategic points. This is already a matter of court record."

Wellington winced. The cameraman caught his changing expressions. From the deck rail three of the London scientists watched unhappily. They had invited themselves aboard, just as the yacht left the harbor an hour before. They had come in the company of Mr. Vest, hoping to learn more of the mysterious natural phenomena of Venus. They were about to be disappointed, they thought. All that was coming was a political squabble.

But Wellington's eyes suddenly lighted with hope. A cutter, which had sped out of New York harbor a few minutes before, was coming alongside. From its deck Mae Krueger waved at him.

"Yo, Mr. Wellington! I've brought you a little prize!"

The cutter tied to the yacht's side and Mae Krueger crossed over. She turned back to the three figures who had accompanied her: Zaleena-Zaleese, Marble Boy, and Stupe Smith.

"Won't you come too, my dears? Or are you going to be stubborn? Come on over, like nice children. Mr. Wellington is all ready to make out a check, aren't you Mr. Wellington?"

Stupe felt the hot anger course through his neck and forehead. "You brought us here under false pretenses, Mae Krueger!"

His muscles stiffened. His left arm, still lightly bandaged, throbbed with pain. He saw that Zaleena was watching with great curiosity. She had heard about Wellington and his million-dollar offer. Now she was seeing him, and she must have known that she was about to be delivered to him.

SHE and Stupe nodded their recognition to Ambassador Jewell. They wondered whether the investigation was going the

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'I TALKED WITH GOD'

Impossible — you say? No, it is not impossible. You can do the same thing. For there has come to the earth a brilliant, shining revelation of the power of The Spirit of God. It has come because the human race, through the Atomic Bomb — could very easily annihilate itself. So the Spirit of God has spoken and the revelation and the Power that is following, staggers the imagination. In the past 18 years, MORE THAN HALF A MILLION people have told us without our asking them, what happened when they too discovered the actual and literal Power of The Spirit of God, right here on earth, in their own lives.

Dr. Frank B. Robinson

The future is dangerous. Fear fills most hearts. But may I say to you that there can come into your life, dancing flashes of the Spiritual Power of God? I mean NOW. And when you do find, and know this beautiful Power, whatever problems, trials, fears which may beset you, melt away under the shimmering Power of God. In place of these fears, doubts, and trials, there comes a lovely Peace — a Peace which only God can give —and POWER? — well —the human race knows little of this POWER, which upsets many old conceptions of God, and puts in YOUR hands, and mine, the Power Jesus promised when He said:—"**The things that I do shall ye do also.**"

I want you to know of this Power. I live for no other purpose. For when this dynamic, invisible Power changed my life, my duty was very plain. TELL OTHERS — that's what God said to me, and I've been doing that faithfully for the past 18 years. Write me a simple postcard, or letter, NOW, and ask me for my 6000 word message, which will give you a slight insight into the most soul-stirring revelation from God this world has ever known. Address me as follows: —"DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON, Dept. 47-2, Moscow, Idaho and this message, which is TOTALLY FREE, will be sent by mail immediately. **But write now—ere you forget.** The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 47-2, Moscow, Idaho.

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right way for him.

"You came just in time," Wellington said to the red-haired Mrs. Krueger, crossing to her and taking her hand. Stupe saw the sly wink that he gave her. "Just in time to give me the proof I need to convince these stupid gentlemen!"

Zaleena whispered to Stupe, asking him what was going to happen. The white stallion poked his head down between them as if to get in on the answers, his eyes wide, his ears on the alert. Stupe replied that he would have no part of this deal. Yes, it was true that he had gone to Venus originally to find the goddess and to bring her back to Wellington.

"But that was before I knew you, my dear," he whispered, reassuring her. "As soon as I saw you—well, you know what happened."

"You fell in love with me?"

"Yes. And then I knew I could never betray you." Stupe's hand tightened upon hers. *"One can't betray those he loves, can he?"*.

"No. No, never! . . . Why are you staring at me so?"

Her amazing innocence! There it was again. Stupe couldn't understand it. He loved her so, and yet every time he remembered her swift betrayal of her people at the bottom of the sea, his whole being was flooded with bitterness. He was afraid of that bitterness, afraid it would grow on him so that someday he would turn upon her with dangerous hatred.

The men on the yacht were calling to her now, ordering her to prove her unusual talent for riding down into the sea. And she wasn't hearing them. She was staring at Stupe, looking through his very soul, trying to read some awful secret there.

"You distrust me, don't you!" she said. "You are accusing me of deserting my people—"

"They're calling you," said Stupe, motioning to the adjoining deck.

"Yes, you distrust me. . . . Don't you?"

"Dudu!" Stupe said fiercely. "Listen to them. They're demanding that you give them a demonstration."

"Stupe, *do* you?"

"Do you hear them, Dudu?"

"*Don't* call me Dudu! You don't mean it. You don't understand me. *You don't know the secrets of the book.* You haven't learned. And you don't trust!"

"They're asking for a demonstration—you and Marble Boy."

"I can't give it! I *can't!*" Then Zaleena-Zaleese—Ocella—Dudu changed her tone. Her words were soft and low and tragic. "All right, Stupe. I'll go down into the sea. *For you.*"

Marble Boy knelt for her, she mounted, and they plunged over the rail into the ocean.

CHAPTER LVII

"THEY'RE sinking!"

It was the mysterious little Mr. Vest who cried the alarm.

Stupe's nerves went taut. What was the matter? Marble Boy was floundering. He acted as if he couldn't swim!

"They'll drown!" Mr. Vest shouted. "Something's wrong!"

Wellington began to curse. This demonstration was to have been his trump card. It would prove that his expeditions *had* gone to Venus for this girl and her horse, and for no other purpose. This was to be his moment of triumph! And now the very Mr. Vest who had sworn that this *was* the girl had suddenly gone into a panic.

Marble boy couldn't swim! He was going down! Zaleena-Zaleese was going down with him!

"Why doesn't she swim?" someone cried. "She isn't even trying!"

The London scientists stared, shaking their wise heads gravely. This was a hoax. The federal investigators scowled, mentally sealing Wellington's doom. Vest and Ambassador Jewell and the cameramen were too confused to do anything. But their eyes applauded Stupe Smith as he plunged over the rail, one bandaged arm tight against his side.

It was a shot for the movie cameras that would long be remembered by the newsreel audiences—the expression of pain and bafflement in Stupe's face giving way to

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the cold steel of determination.

For minutes, it seemed, the figures were out of sight. Stupe had dived deep into the blackness that had swallowed Zaleena and the stallion.

"Two minutes . . ." Someone was counting the time. ". . . and ten seconds . . . Two-twenty . . . Two-forty . . . Three minutes . . ."

The waters were roiling underneath. Stupe was coming up, fighting the waters with his good arm and two good legs, clinging to Zaleena's hair with his bandaged hand . . .

Air! They reached the surface. Stupe took in a breath. The girl sputtered and choked. When they got her up on the deck she clung to the floor, her head in her arms, sobbing, "Marble Boy! . . . Marble Boy! . . ."

Marble Boy, Stupe knew, had raced down into the sea for the last time. His proud head and flowing mane, his gleaming white body and thumping hoofs, his godlike grace and strength would never be seen again. He had served his goddess to the last, and in his effort to help her end her own life, he had expended his last breath.

"Marble Boy!" Zaleena wept . . .

MANY hours later the girl talked of herself—as a goddess and as a person—and the group of people on Wellington's yacht listened to her every word. It was twilight. The sea was calm, a silvery calm.

"I am no longer a goddess," she said simply. "When I left Venus I tossed my jeweled harpoon to—to someone else. If the Spirit approves my choice, that person will receive my gift of Youth Eternal—a gift that I no longer desire. You see, I chose to renounce my deity."

"Why?" someone asked.

"For many reasons, perhaps. But it is enough that I fell in love and wanted to marry. As my husband advances in years, I wish to keep pace with him."

Stupe tightened his arm around her waist. What a mysterious person. In some ways he didn't understand her at all. But this he understood. She wanted to

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be just a human being because she loved him so.

"At once, after relinquishing my deity," she went on, "I was given to the mistakes of humans. I will have to learn patience anew. It was weak of me, and terribly rash, to leap overboard with Marble Boy. . . ." She brushed her eyes with a handkerchief. "I was too suddenly shattered, believing someone did not trust me. Surely I was wrong."

"It wasn't distrust," Stupe said. "It's simply that I don't understand."

"I know. You *can't* understand. Not until you've read more in the book. Not until you've gone back to Venus to see . . ."

CHAPTER LVIII

THE radio news that reached the space ship as it was racing into the skies had little to do with the mysteries of Venus and the gifts of deities. Regarding such puzzles the matter-of-fact newscasters were hopelessly baffled. But more earthly affairs, such as business deals involving the well-known financier, Mr. Wellington, made headline news.

Mr. Vest and the London Scientists, according to the broadcast, had scored an important victory over Mr. Wellington. They had made a philanthropist of him! He had donated several hundred thousand dollars to the London Scientists to carry on scientific research in the little known lands of Venus.

Ambassador Jewell chuckled as he heard the news, and Stupe knew that this was the ambassador's victory too. The great financier had barely squirmed out of an embarrassing run-in with the federal government; he would do well to play angel with his dollars from now on.

"Listen, Stupe. You've made headlines, too," said the ambassador.

Stupe saw Zaleena's knowing smile as the radio announcement came through.

". . . an important government assignment has been given to 'Stupendous Smith,' the explorer, who is now on his way back to Venus. He will assist Ambassador Jewell in the development of Venus lands. As roving ambassador, he will help keep peace among the various native groups on this planet. His wife, by the way, is a native of Venus . . ."

Stupe tapped his head to be sure he was awake. Was he hearing straight?

"It's official," said Ambassador Jewell, "if you'll accept the appointment."

"I—I think I'll accept." Stupe, hesitating, looked from Jewell to Zaleena. "Still —I wonder—"

"He is wondering," said Zaleena, "whether he can make peace with the world of people he left under the sea."

"Yes, that's it. *If* there are any survivors, they're sure to remember my hoax, playing that I was the Old Man—"

"Shall we not worry," said Zaleena, "until we see whether there are any survivors?"

When the space ship reached Venus it radioed its report to the capitol and proceeded immediately to the Southeast Ocean.

"Something has changed!" Stupe kept saying. "The land is different!"

AIR-CRUISING slowly over the Thirteen Fingers, Stupe began to realize what had happened. Those several mountainous projections that had extended into the sea were no longer surrounded by water. They were surrounded by wide acres of muddy beaches. The sea had apparently receded!

"The coastline has risen, Stupe. . . . Do you remember the words of the book? Do you recall the voice of the Spirit at the time of our marriage ceremony?"

"The Spirit told us," said Stupe, somewhat dazed, "that the city was *weighed down*. Wasn't that it?"

"It was weighed down with the weight of its deities. With fewer deities to bear down upon its people, *it would be lifted*. That is what has happened, Stupe. The whole shoreline has risen."

"Is it possible?" I wonder how many feet it's risen."

"More than ten," said Zaleena, smiling wistfully. "Maybe sixty-thousand or some big number like that."

The concentric rings of light—yellow and orange and red—which had once

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shown through the surface of the waters were no longer sumerged. As the space ship floated through the air above the Tenth Finger, Stupe saw that *the whole city had risen.*

"The salad bowl!" Stupe exclaimed. "The whole darned up-side-down salad bowl is standing up on dry land. Well, of all the miracles! Do you suppose there's anything left of the city inside?"

Zaleena smiled and said, "Stupe, tell me, what is a salad bowl?"

"It's a bowl they put salad in."

"Oh. But what is salad?"

Stupe laughed. "Well, it's—it's a lot of stuff they throw together to eat. Like if you'd mix up some of that red gelatine from snails, and toss in some cookie-grass, and add a little—"

He had started to say *mayonnaise,* but the word *horse-radish* had come to his lips, and he had suddenly stopped speaking. It was good for Zaleena to be playful. He must never say anything to bring up that painful memory . . .

The concentric circles of light glowed through the massive stone-glass bowl that stood solid upon the muddy, sea-washed land. One break could be seen in the south side of the wall, where the remains of the old patch were being removed by workmen, the sunlight streaming in upon them and their scaffolds.

ON THE top of the structure the small plastic platform stood like a roof garden, overlooking the land and sea. The platform was occupied by a number of very busy persons, including eight members of the earth party.

The ship moored to the platform and Stupe, Zaleena, and the ambassador stepped forth.

"Vat's dis?" cried a familiar voice. "Der no-good pennies iss returning! And bless dem, dot's good!"

Gypsy Brown! Hefty! The three Stevens girls! And in addition, a small bospital-full of recuperating persons from the flooded city. Dr. Jabetta had taken charge in the very first moments that first aid could be given. With the assistance of Jake Fiddle and Frenchy and the

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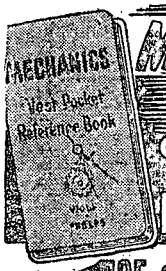

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others, he was making hospital history for the afflicted natives.

"Welcome to our open-air living quarters," Hefty said. He and Stupe shook hands three times before they could be sure it was real.

Several hours later Stupe learned all of the picturesque details. As Hefty explained, "We were drowning for hours, mentally, as that water whirled up along the walls, higher and higher. We busted our hands trying to fight out of our bars, and darn you, Stupe, I couldn't forget that you had been the Old Man who had chucked us back in these coops. I still think I ought to bust you in the nose, but I reckon I'll have to wait till your arm gets well."

"All I could do," said Gypsy, "vas close my eyes and dream I vould svallow der vlood as fast as it came."

"Then what happened? Did this Spirit-cloud push the water away from you, too?"

"No, the flood began to back away. You could see it going down, gradually. It kept going down for days, and there didn't seem to be any more sea to pour in on us. In other words, we had slowly risen above the level of the sea."

"And you were still in your cells?"

"Naw, that clever little winged boy kept flying back with one weapon after another until he came through with some crowbars that pried us loose. Right away the doc began dispensing first aid, and we helped him, and the city took us to their bosoms."

Most of the ten thousand persons hadn't been touched, miraculously. They had found it hard to believe that the flood was receding and the waters draining off through the mine tunnels. But after several days they discovered that they had been *lifted*.

"And then," said Stupe, "did they remember the words of the Spirit?"

"You should have heard them," said Hefty.

One of the Stevens girls chimed in excitedly. "You never heard a group of people change their tune so quick. They knew, then, why Zaleena had taken flight. They were being *unweighted*, so to speak.

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She had forsaken her own advantages, you see, because she *knew*."

"Thank you," said Zaleena softly, as she came up to the group. "Now that you have said these kind words, I think that my good husband understands."

STUPE took her in his arms and kissed her with all the fullness of his understanding love. "We're going to understand everything from now on," he said, "now that we're no longer deities." Then—"By the way, which one of these folks caught the jeweled harpoon that you tossed away, Dudu? Who received your gift of Youth Eternal, that is, if the Spirit approves your choice?"

Zaleena smiled. "I gave it to a youth. When he grows up he will still remain youthful through his years."

"Will he weigh upon the city and cause it to sink again?"

"I think not, because he has wings."

"Gooyay!" Stupe exclaimed.

"Yes. As a deity he will do much to bring peace to the various people of this land. His father is one of the rising wingman leaders."

"My Gooyay!" exclaimed Gypsy Brown, dancing around in circles. "Vat good news! As soon as ve fly back to der capital I'll write a letter to der earth telling all about my leedle Gooyay. Vat you know! I'm an auntie to an angel—the leedle dickens! I vonder if he can get me back my zootcase."

"Good news," said the ambassador. "I already have your suitcase. Some good wingman returned it several days ago."

"My lands! Dot *iss* good news." It was a good thing Gypsy didn't have wings or she would have taken off in flight.

The good news was coming in bunches. At that moment the heavy stomps on the spiral stairs caused the group to turn.

"Good news," said a very rotund and weary-faced citizen, puffing through his thick lips. Stupe at once recognized him as his old boss, the Inspector. "The committee of six announces a celebration and banquet in honor of the rise of the city, and you are all invited."

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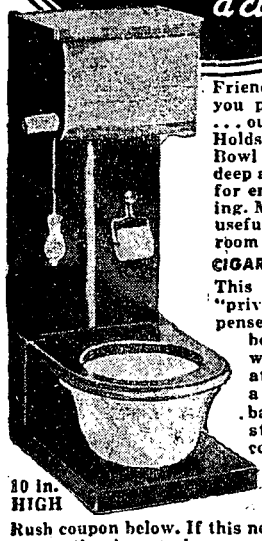

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Amid the cheering Stupe felt Zaleena draw back into the protection of his arms. Was she shrinking from this invitation?

"You needn't be afraid to go," he whispered. "You're not a deity any longer."

She smiled at him faintly and he knew there was sadness back of her smile.

"It's just that they're used to seeing me with Marble Boy . . . How can I celebrate when my remorse is so heavy?"

The radio operator broke in upon the circle at that moment, bounding across from the space ship to the platform with a message in his hand.

"Some news for you, Zaleena. It's about Marble Boy. They've identified him by the white powder in his mane."

"His body?"

"He swam up out of the sea. He was half dead, they say, but they're giving him the best of care somewhere in New York and he's going to pull through. Mae Krueger identified him for you. She says that everything's going to be all right, and she also wants you to know she's sorry if she mistreated you."

"Oh . . . Oh . . . Marble Boy!" The face of the beautiful Zaleena-Zaleese-Ocella-Dudu was more radiant, Stupe thought, than the face of any goddess he ever hoped to see—on Venus or Mars or Jupiter.

"Yes, Marble Boy," the operator repeated, "and they'll take care of him until you have a chance to come for him . . . Good news?"

"Good news!" shouted Hefty and the Stevens sisters and Stupendous Smith simultaneously. And Gypsy Brown outshouted them all.

"Dot's efen better news than my zootcase!"

THE END

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THE LOST CONTINENTS . . . AS SCIENCE SEES THEM . . .

By JERRY WALSH

SCIENTISTS have offered a great many convincing arguments in their attempt to prove that the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific once held the mysterious and now lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria. They represent only one school of thought on the subject in their firm belief that the mystifying similarities of expression in the highly developed cultures of the East and West exist because these widely separated peoples stem from the same source. The original civilization arose in Lemuria, or Atlantis, and due to chaotic climatic and geological changes these two continents dropped into the sea while their populations migrated to nearby shores for safety. While specific proof is lacking in the geological sphere—since the secrets of the ocean floor are still to be probed—reasonable proof has been put forth that such a sinking of land masses is possible and may have actually occurred. With this as a starting point, the case for the existence of two highly developed ocean cultures has been built up. When they passed out of the world scene, their remnants were scattered far and wide—to Egypt, India, China, as well as the shores of America.

The opposing school of thought assumes that man arose in different parts of the world spontaneously, that all of the human race did not originate in one specific area. They believe that identical environmental factors in isolated parts of the world caused man to respond in identical ways, that it was perfectly natural—using one example—for tribal worship all over the globe to center about the sun. The sun was the greatest and most obvious of nature's miracles. They explain the presence of men with Asiatic facial characteristics (the Indians) on this continent as the result of migration from Mongolia across the once-connected Aleutians, through Alaska and down the Canadian coast. Their position is clear when opposed to the pro-Lemurians who believe that both the Chinese and the American Indians, who look so much alike, came from Lemuria.

"Lemuria" was the name first used by the Englishman Slater for the hypothetical continent because in all of its remaining parts he found the same kind of monkeys. The continent was thought to extend, by filling in the Indian Ocean, from Africa to both the Indies and was joined by way of the Sunda Island with Australia. A land bridge connected West Africa with Brazil and became for a certain period the connecting link with the Lemurian continent. The numerous archipelagoes in the Sunda Sea and Indian Ocean are the ruins of

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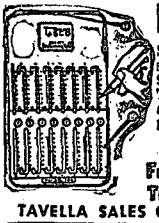

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the continent Lemuria. The Azores, Madiera and Canary Islands in the Atlantic were thought to be much larger at one time and located closer to the continents of Europe and Asia forming the legendary Atlantis of the ancient world. The Azores, St. Paul, Ascension and Tristan Cunha Islands are but the highest peaks of a mountain range which rises from the depths of the Atlantic Ocean.

THE surface of the earth is forever changing; that fact has been proved beyond all doubt. From period to period the proportion of land to sea varies. The role of vulcanism in the formation of the earth's surface has undergone little investigation. Some 430 volcanoes are active at present—and it must always be remembered that they are, comparatively speaking, mere dwarfs—but the number of the extinct must be estimated at ten times this figure. The French geologist and Alpinist Termier gave sensational reports on the geological structure of sub-oceanic territory. According to him a multitude of facts favor the theory of a large late geological Atlantean archipelago. This part of the earth is a zone of great geotonic unrest. When the Brest-Cape Cod and Boston cable was lifted in the summer of 1898, the French cable layers made a remarkable discovery; at the point of the break 900 kilometers north of the Azores, soundings brought bubbling basalt lava to the surface. Exact petrographic investigation has found that such lava can never form in water with a pressure of 3000 meters upon it. Only in the open air, under normal atmospheric conditions, does it harden into such formation. If this lava had been the product of a sub-oceanic eruption, it would have spread in layers like dough. And the well-preserved, fine, needle-like points permit the assumption that the lava was not long exposed to the influence of atmospheric conditions. This leads to the conclusion that the sub-oceanic islands must once have been above the surface, but comparatively soon after their development water submerged the volcano.

Some of the most logical reasons to assume earlier direct connections between now distant segments of continents deal with the similarity in flora and fauna. These scientific discoveries have had a startling effect on the old and stagnant theories. The sole relatives of the Australian dasyuer lived, for instance, in South America; fossils and recent specimens were unearthed in these two territories only. In the Miocene layers of Western Europe American plant types have been found. On both sides one discovers fossils of animals which today live isolated in either the Old or New Worlds; in Nebraska are skeletons of the horse in all stages, while in Europe the horse was existent even in the Paleolithic Age.

In the similarity of legends, religious rites, and symbols we find the threads which lead us to believe that the highly developed but widely separated ancient cultures stem from a central source. Common to all early cultures was the tale of a great, all destroying flood. With a few odd varia-

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tions, the legend remains basically the same. Without exception they relate that only a few men are saved in an ark, a box, or a canoe. The story of Noah appears, not only in the Old Testament, but in the legends of the Mayans, the Melanesians, and the ancient Chinese. How it is possible for such widely separated primitive peoples as these of Asia, the Pacific islands, and the American continent to claim an identical event? Some scientists are willing to admit that in all myths there rests an element of scientific truth, and that the universal nature of the great flood can not be doubted. Is is not possible to conceive the Pacific continent of Lemuria being covered by a series of tidal waves and dropping into the ocean as a result of gigantic volcanic disturbances forcing the terror-stricken remnants of her population to put out in boats for the open sea?

According to archeological research, over the entire world of pre-history were spread identical language roots and letters, ceramic forms, mythological and religious concepts, architectural patterns and articles of fashion. This is a preplexing phenomena for it is generally understood that most of the very early cultures had no contact with one another unless—yes, unless such a continent as Lemuria or Atlantis existed.

TAKE these astounding examples into consideration. As a sign of mourning, the Polynesians, Hottentots, and Bushmen amputate a finger joint—as did the American Indian before the time of Columbus. Trepanning the skull was an ancient horror which was linked with certain mystic notions of demons tormenting the brain and causing illness. The skull was opened to allow the demons to escape. This bit of stone age therapeutics existed in Southern France and Northern Africa of the paleolithic period; it was later customary among the Peruvians; and today it is found among the Kabyles and Melanesians.

Relatively less dangerous was the practice of altering the shape of the skull. The ancient American Indians and the early inhabitants of Crimea and the Caucasus knew of it. Among the Mayas it seems to have been a prerogative of caste; the flat, receding skulls of the Toltec and Mayan priests and princes, as shown on the carved reliefs of Mitla and Palenque, differ sharply from the normal skulls of the common people.

The pyramid is one of the best known products of ancient civilzation. Traditionally the first pyramid was built in Egypt where it was used as a tomb. The Sumerians used them as astronomical observatories and temples. Southeastern Asia built them as temples to glorify the deeds of the gods. The pyramids at the opposite side of the world in the land of the Toltecs and Mayas serves as the base of temples and palaces. The pyramids of Yunca were the monumental tombs of the pre-Inca emperors. In Aztec Mexico the pyramid became the bloody altar to a god who ate human hearts. In Asia, Iberia, Sardinia, and Bolivia the pyramid became a tomb because it gave the body

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the nearest approach to heaven. All pyramids of the world were originally built as stations of refuge whenever there was danger of great floods with no mountains nearby for protection.

As yet no convincing answer has been found to provide a satisfactory solution to these cases of "cultural promiscuity." Somewhere and at some time there must have existed a common mother to all later cultural developments. With that assumption the phantasy of legends has been built up. Great thinkers of all ages have played with the idea. They have constructed the continents of Lemuria and Atlantis in their minds to provide the missing geographical links.

Solon, Herodotus, and Diodorus were among the first. Plato tells of "a mighty power which came forth out of the Atlantic." He chose to call this miracle-island Poseidonis. Aristotle ridiculed Plato's theory, while Tertullion believed in it. Pliny chose to doubt Plato. But through the ages the legend has lived. Mountains of literature on Atlantis exists. Among the antique sources are the well-preserved picture scripts of the American Indians, and the codifices of the Mayas. In the last 450 years literature about Atlantis has been multiplying. Some of the most famous works are those written by Francis Bacon ("Nova Atlantis") and Jean Silvain Baillys.

The mysterious monasteries of Tibet are rumored to hold treasures guarded for ten thousands of years in the form of the oldest books of man. Some believe that it is there the tale of the history of the glory and downfall of Lemuria and Atlantis is kept hidden from the eyes of men of our time. But the majority of us would rather put our faith in the belief that the time is not too far distant when the eyes of the scientific world will focus upon the hidden depths of the seas and reveal the secrets buried there, proving or disproving beyond doubt existence of those fabulous lands.

MYSTERY OF THE GENE

★ By JOHN KENT ★

THERE was a scientist once who chopped off the tails of generations of rats to prove a point. He was neither a fool nor a sadist, but a serious investigator into the problem of heredity. His name was Weismann and he wanted to prove that no matter how an organism was mutilated, the effect was nil on subsequent generations. He proved his point.

Foolish nonsense! Well, why is it that a blind man can have children that see? How can a man with one leg have a child that is perfect? We moderns are prone to pass over the answer too lightly, as if only a simple explanation was warranted.

Actually our knowledge of heredity has come the hard way. Darwin started the ball rolling when he pointed out that all living things were

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related, the simple cell as well as the complex mammal. When he tried to explain why these were variations, however, he was up against it. His argument of "natural selection" stated that each generation fought the battle with its environment. The species that conformed to its environment and was strong was able to live while the rest died. How could the environment at once destroy the non-conformist and create new species? To this the Darwinians could only answer vaguely and, at best, generally.

The Austrian monk, Mendel, took the next step toward the answer. He grew sweet peas in his garden, crossed and recrossed them, and then formulated the now famous Mendelian laws of heredity. It opened the Darwinian ideas to argumentation, namely, that not all members of a generation are involved in a change. How could variation be explained, let alone predicted?

Then Weismann, a staunch adherent of Darwin, began to chop off the tails of rats. He preached the doctrine of germ plasm, the doctrine that the germ cells or eggs are not the product of the body in which they are found but of the germ cells or eggs of the previous generation.

Weismann did not stop here, however. Within the cells he found new bodies—chromosomes, they were called. But even within the chromosomes there was a smaller unit to be reckoned with. It was the gene.

As is the case with each new step in scientific discovery, the gene was not accepted without extensive testing of its existence. Thomas Hunt Morgan's use of the now famous Drosophila melanogoster, a fruit fly that breeds a new generation every nine days, is already legendary. Since he could study twenty-five generations in a single year, the equivalent of five-hundred years of human family life, he could verify or disprove the theory that the germ plasm could be modified and new changes in the fly species evolved from the old.

Morgan bred flies by the millions and kept a carefully indexed Almanack de Gotha of their children and of their children's children. No human family is as sure of its ancestry as Morgan is of his fruit flies, progenitors. For the more than twenty million flies that he and his school examined, they found about four hundred mutants, or changes, that bred true.

Morgan assumed that the genes of the male chromosomes exactly matched the genes of the female chromosomes. Thus the genes that control wing shape in one chromosome lie opposite the corresponding genes in the mating chromosome. The same was true of the matching genes that determine eye color, length of hair and the hundreds of other attributes of a fruit fly, a bird, a cow, or a man. Genes crossed over from one chromosome to the other. The children received them from both father and mother. At last it became apparent why children are so like their parents. Crossing and recrossing also explained why children depart in similarity from their

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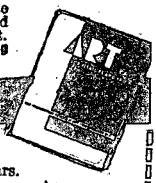

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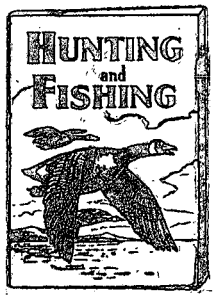

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These attributes can be combined in different ways. The 2,000 to 2,500 genes in which they are contained are strung out like beads, each different from every other in the string, each playing its own role in the highly complicated economy of the cell. Of their existence, however, there can be no doubt.

As final evidence of their existence and of the all-important role which they play in the process of heredity, we need only examine the experiment conducted by Professor H. S. Mueller. Its grotesque results would seem even more weird if we did not see it as evidence of scientific truth.

Professor Mueller was concerned with determining whether or not the gene was actually the ultimate unit of heredity. He had seen his fellow scientists try by every means available to change their constitution and arrangement. They had tried drugging, poisoning, intoxication, anesthetics, bright lights, utter darkness, suffocation, whirling in centrifugal machines, mechanical shaking, mutilation, heating, chilling, starving, overfeeding, all in vain.

Then Professor Mueller decided to use the methods of the atomic physicists. If they could smash the atom with X-rays then perhaps the same attack could break down the gene. He tried and the results were startling, to say the least!

What actually happened is not yet clear. Apparently the genes were either changed chemically or shifted out of their places . . . perhaps both. Instead of four hundred mutants out of twenty million, Mueller got one hundred and fifty times as many. He had accelerated the evolutionary process 150 per cent. And what monstrosities! Flies with eyes that bulged, flies with eyes that were sunken, flies with hair that was curly, ruffled, parted, fine, and coarse, flies that were bald, flies with extra legs or antennae or no legs or antennae, flies with wings of every conceivable shape or with virtually no wings at all, big flies and little flies, active flies and sluggish flies, sterile flies and fertile flies.

Yes, Professor Mueller had struck the roots of life, and they had yielded. The problem of evolution had been narrowed down to the gene. To the men of science of the future lies the next step, that of fathoming the chemistry of the gene itself. Perhaps this will be the final answer in the problem of life.

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THE GOLDEN TOUCH

By PETE BOGG

OF ALL get-rich-quick plans, the idea of turning baser metals into gold, has probably absorbed the energies of most men throughout the ages. Even in our own day, now and then, a man appears who claims to have the secret to the alchemist's puzzle. One of the most recent of these was Dr. S. H. Emmens of New York.

Dr. Emmens was not usually given to such imaginative experiments. His fame as a chemist rested upon solid ground. He was the inventor of a U. S. Army-approved explosive called "Emmensite," and a member of the American Chemical Society as well as the U. S. Naval Institute.

In 1899, Dr. Emmens began selling gold in small but steady quantities to the U. S. Mint. When questioned about its source, he made the astounding statement that he manufactured the gold by changing the atomic structure of silver through continuous hammerings at extremely low temperatures in a special cylinder. After this mechanical treatment, the silver was subjected to a chemical treatment, the nature of which Dr. Emmens refused to divulge.

Emmens' account of his production of gold attracted the attention of the great English physicist, Sir William Crooke, who began an extensive flow of correspondence to the New York chemist. Finally Emmens was prevailed upon to reveal his secret formula to Crooke, who promptly spent a fortune in duplicating Emmens' apparatus.

In Crooke's first experiment he used silver containing a trace of gold. Unbelievable as it may seem, the gold content was increased twenty-one per cent by the processing. The implications of the success of the formula were tremendous. It was conceivable that, if the manufacture of gold became extensive, the metal might some day become so plentiful that its value would drop. Whole monetary systems based on the gold standard would collapse. Yet, this condition never came to pass. For Crooke's second experiment was a failure. He blamed it on his not having followed the directions of Emmens, but the explanation seemed flimsy. Stranger still, though, is the fact that a third experiment was never attempted. Nor could Crooke ever explain his original success.

Not long afterwards, Dr. Emmens died, carrying his priceless secret to the grave. A subsequent investigation, in 1929 by Lieutenant Commander Rupert T. Gould, R.N., found no reason for suspecting fraud on Emmens' part. He is still America's only alchemist, a man who could turn silver into gold.

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What's My Job?—I Manufacture Weaklings into MEN!

Charles Atlas

Actual photograph of the man who holds the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

GIVE ME a skinny, pepless, second-rate body—and I'll cram it so full of handsome, bulging new muscle that your friends will grow bug-eyed! . . . I'll wake up that sleeping energy of yours and make it hum like a high-powered motor! Man, you'll **feel** and **look** different! You'll begin to **LIVE!**

Let Me Make YOU a NEW MAN —IN JUST 15 MINUTES A DAY!

YOU wouldn't believe it, but I myself used to be a 97-lb. weakling. Fellows called me "Skinny." Girls snickered and made fun of me behind my back. I was a flop. THEN I discovered my marvelous new muscle-building system—"*Dynamic Tension.*" And it turned me into such a **complete** specimen of MANHOOD that today I hold the title "THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

That's how I traded in my "bag of bones" for a barrel of muscle! And I felt so much better, so much **on top of the world** in my big, new, husky body, that I decided to devote my whole life to helping **other** fellows change themselves into "perfectly developed men."

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ONE POSTAGE STAMP MAY CHANGE YOUR WHOLE LIFE!

As I've pictured up above, I m steadily building broad-shouldered dynamic MEN—day by day—the country over.

2,000,000 fellows, young and old, have already gambled a postage stamp to ask for my FREE book. They wanted to read and see for themselves how I'm building up scrawny bodies, and how I'm paring down fat, flabby ones—how I'm turning them into breath-taking human dynamos of pure MANPOWER.

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